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# CHRISTIAN FAITH AND DEMOCRACY

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## CHAPTER I

### MAGIC vs. MATURE FAITH

Two questions must be asked concerning the Christian faith, or any other faith:

- (1) Can I believe it?
- (2) Is it worth believing?

The first asks: Is this faith true? The second asks: Is it effective; and, if so, to what end?

The title of this little book throws the weight of emphasis heavily on the second of these questions. It does not promise a formal theological discussion of what this writer believes to be the content of our Christian faith. There are plenty of those on the market. Our purpose here is to face an urgent, immediate problem: the present crisis in our democratic way of life. Does our Christian faith have anything to say about the struggle that is going on around us, a life-and-death struggle as it is for so many of our fellows? Does it tend to detach us from that struggle, to isolate us from it in pious neutrality, or does it send us into it with greater devotion, clearer direction, and steadier resources than those who are in it with another faith or with no faith? The aim of this book is to answer this question.

And just because this is our aim, we cannot disregard the question of truth. Is our Christian faith the truth about the world, or is it something that we should like to be true but suspect to be false? If our faith is an illusion, no matter how inspiring or how comforting, then the sooner we get rid of it, the better for ourselves and for the cause that we would serve.

The charge that Christianity, and indeed all religion, is an illusion has come recently not from crack-pots and corner-store atheists, but from men of unimpeachable good



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faith and good judgment. In a book with the provocative title, *The Future of an Illusion*,<sup>1</sup> the great pioneer in clinical psychology, Sigmund Freud, made this very charge. Religion, he declared, is a symptom of the lingering childishness of the human race. Religious beliefs are "illusions, fulfilments of the oldest, strongest, and most insistent wishes of mankind." Their function is to protect the masses of men in their unwillingness, or perhaps their inability, to face the real world, with its perils, its frustration, its cruelty. I know of no more devastating indictment against the truth of religion than Freud's patronizing estimate of its medicinal utility:

The true believer is in a high degree protected against the danger of certain neurotic afflictions; by accepting the universal neurosis he is spared the task of forming a personal neurosis.

We cannot ignore this charge. If it is true, then religion is false. And if religion is false, then the sooner we get rid of it, the better for men's mind and soul. Only an irreligious view could concede that religion, though an illusion, should still be preserved as a shock-absorber for fragile minds. In all but its most debased forms religion has inspired and sustained man's effort to achieve sincerity and escape sham: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." If religion is not the truth, but a protection against the truth, then, no matter how useful for psychological or political purposes, it is not what it has claimed to be. It is then a contemptible fraud, and it becomes a religious task to destroy religion.

That is why I am forced to face squarely Freud's accusation, and ask: What is the childish attitude to life, as Freud and others have diagnosed it? What kind of religion protects this attitude? Is there another faith closer to Freud's atheism than to much gullible dogmatism, yet strangely

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<sup>1</sup> When I wrote this I had not yet seen Freud's last book, *Moses and Monotheism*.

neglected by Freud in his examination of religion, a faith that rests not on illusion but on the single-minded effort to understand reality, and surrender any belief, no matter how sacred, if there is no ground for it in objective fact?

### 1. *What is Childishness?*

(a) *The Illusion of Omnipotence.* We usually think of the new-born infant as the weakest, most helpless of all creatures. So he is—from our own world-wise point of view. From his own point of view, just the opposite is the case. Few monarchs have had such nearly absolute power as the infant in his crib. His wants are few and simple. And the willingness of those about him to meet those wants is almost unbounded. They hover around him solicitously, eager to predict his needs, even before he feels them. And should they miss any detail, the baby can resort to one well-nigh omnipotent weapon: he can yell.

In such a world the infant is protected from the one thing that creates the feeling of impotence: the gap between desire and fulfilment. His experience is nearly that of an Aladdin's lamp world: there is hardly anything he wants that he does not get.

The time, of course, will soon come when his wishes will outrun the capacity of the willingness of his world to fulfil them. He will then strike his first disenchantment, the first *No* from the world, the first *I Cannot* for himself. Will he have the strength to stand the shock of this refusal? Reality, which denies and thwarts his wishes, is so alien a realm of being that he may retreat back into his own world of dream and fancy. He may build up fictions that will grant him imaginary fulfilments. And religion may provide a golden key into this land of heart's desire: a more respectable release from reality than fairies and Santa Claus.

(b) *The Ego-centric Universe.* The infant is a naïve and innocent egoist: not that he wilfully subordinates the interests of others to his own; but that he has as yet no sense of the existence of other persons. He does not even experience



himself as a separate personality. All that he knows of himself is the force of his wants. All that he knows of others is their ability to meet those wants. Others are ministering instruments. His love for them is pleasure in their compliance with his will. If he could formulate his view of the world, he would say: "I am the natural center of this universe." Hence the jealousy of the little child: a passion perhaps more intense than anything the adult can ever duplicate. The very existence of a rival center, a rival claimant of love shatters one of the first principles of his world-view.

Yet the time must come when he awakes to a world with billions of other centers and no center. Will he accept this dethronement? Or will he retreat into his shelter of fancy and reverie, and there remain the hero of his dreams and even of his nightmares? So long as he does this, he will remain a child.

(c) *The Short-range Reaction to Life.* For the adult, the present is only a link between past and future. For the child, the time-span hardly exists. Nothing exists except its present: pleasure, fear, impatience, discomfort in the present. These feelings are all-absorbing. There is no memory of things past nor anticipation of things to come to moderate the imperious dominance of the immediate feeling. That is why it is so hard to induce a sense of responsibility in a child. This must involve a reference to past and future: a recognition of what happened before, and will in all probability happen again. "Don't eat all that candy, Johnny. Remember what happened Thursday, how sick you got from too much candy?" Johnny goes on eating unperturbed. What he feels is not the stomach-ache of last Thursday, nor the probable stomach-ache of an hour hence. All he knows is that candy tastes sweet. And, unless stronger measures are taken to persuade him, he keeps on eating, till the feeling of sweetness begins to turn to "a queer feeling in my tummy."

Now we all know that maturity is not a matter of vegetable growth; that many people of mature years exhibit attitudes

and traits of character that are forcefully reminiscent of the infant's. Many of the mild abnormalities of otherwise normal people strike us as sheer childishness, and we often condemn or excuse them with this very word. Flights of fantasy; delusions of grandeur or persecution; exhibitionism and inflated self-conceit; possessiveness, jealousy, and touchy, easily wounded feelings; scatter-brained undertakings, short-sighted purposes, brittle enthusiasms, and moody extremes between heights of excitement and depths of depression; emotional short-cuts and emotional triviality—many of these lapses from normality are relapses into childishness. Their common source seems to be a loose connection with reality: a kind of excursion from the world of struggle and failure to a private resort where one's feelings are more protected and one's self-admiration (or self-pity) more easily indulged.

But where will one go to escape from reality? By definition, reality is all there is; which is only another way of saying, that there is no escaping it. That is the neurotic's predicament. He cannot really escape reality. He can only pretend that he does. His escape is imaginary. In imagination he returns to the childish paradise of omnipotence, ego-centricity, irresponsibility. But he cannot return to the charm of that paradise, its irrevocable innocence. Unlike the new-born infant, he knows something of the real world. And all his attempts at self-deceit can never quite efface that knowledge which he renews unwillingly as long as he retains a particle of sanity. His illusions are always unsteady; he must be on his guard to prop them up at every moment, lest they topple over and uncover his fraud. Hence his fear, anxiety, insecurity—the real hell of the neurotic's unreal heaven.

## *2. Childish Religion*

For such a person, and for any other adult who is still emotionally a child, religion may be one of two things: It may demand that he transform his basic attitudes, face reality, relinquish ego-centricity, accept responsibility; or else



it may console and confirm him in his childish ways, releasing him from the natural world, in which they are so obviously out of place, into a supernatural world that guarantees his dearest wishes against frustration, reinstates him in the center of the cosmic stage, and relieves him of responsibility to change himself and his world. In the latter instance we have the religion that Freud so justly derides as a "universal neurosis." But this social disease is not the whole of religion, as it is certainly not religion at its best. Strictly speaking, it should not be called religion at all. Its proper name is magic. Let me explain:

There is something about the real world that makes the craving for omnipotence visibly futile and self-destroying. Everything in this real world has its own determinate nature: It is what it is, and mere wishing will not make it different. Ocean water is salty; spring water is not. Straw will burn; stones will not. That is a portion of the world's pattern. I can only work with that pattern and through it, never against it. If I try to go against it, I waste my time, and may break my head, but I must still submit to the pattern. I am part of it and one with it in a strange way that may be ignored but never escaped.

That sense of at-oneness with environing reality is a steady-  
ing undertone of my sane, creative moments. Weaving a basket, watching the fiber take shape from my hand, I sense no disunity between myself and the external material. The growing form expresses as much the nature of the material as the direction of my will. Will and material move in a single rhythm. There may be a hitch. I made a mistake; I must go back, and start over. But no matter how blocked I feel for awhile, I do not lose confidence in a growing order I may discover if I have the patience and the skill.

There is a mood in which the rhythm is broken and cannot be mended, for confidence is lost. It is the mood of fear. Then reality seems menacing and hostile. I should like to isolate myself from it, if I only could, shut myself away from it, where death, disease, humiliation, cannot reach

me. That is the mood in which magic has greatest power over me; for it promises escape. It tells me that there is another world of invisible powers that can overrule the laws of this world for my benefit. It can give me rain, when nature gives none. It can give fertility to naturally barren land. It can restore me the omnipotence that I never quite renounced. It assures me that, for all my apparent insignificance, I can be the center of this vast universe, and impose my will on all that happens in it, if I will only propitiate the superior powers.

How does all this happen? This is the one question I must not ask. To ask for a "how," is to ask for cause and effect. It is to bring back the patterned order from which magic would deliver us. Hence the essence of magic is its mystery. Its acts bear no observable relation to their intended result. What is the relation between the sacrifice of a lamb and the increase of my crops? Nobody knows. It is a mystery. There are two visible events: what I give up to God, and what (presumably) God will give me in return. In between, the supernatural connection is shrouded in mystery. Nobody knows, not even the high-priest, how it is that the burning of the entrails of an animal works upon God to make him the instrument of my omnipotence.

And, because it is a mystery, magic is exempt from the ordinary checks of responsible conduct: good sense, good taste, even good morals. Insane, hideous, brutal acts have flourished under its sanction. It has commanded such things as human sacrifice and sacred prostitution. Because it is a mystery, magic has been a stubborn enemy of progress. Its rites must not be changed, for you do not understand them; and, if you try to change them, you may change the wrong thing. So any craft, art, or institution that comes under its pall stiffens. Because magic is a mystery, it cannot permanently deliver men from fear. On the contrary, it multiplies the sources of fear, and adds supernatural terrors to natural ones. Those who turn to it from fear can be subjected through their fear.



Thus magic is a godsend to an exploiting class. Its sanction protects their authority from criticism when their authority stands condemned by every standard of criticism. Its conservatism preserves their institutions from change when mechanical invention and human need clamor for change. It offers consolation and diversion to the masses, and makes their yoke more tolerable and more secure. It stifles with supernatural terrors any impulse to rebellion. Magical religion is indeed "the opium of the people."

### 3. *Mature Religion*

It is easy enough to see why men such as Voltaire, Thomas Paine, John Stuart Mill, Marx, or Freud should have no patience with magical religion. But what we may not forget is that the classic offensive against it has come from within the ranks of religion itself. It was the prophets of Israel who attacked the crude and corrupt other-worldliness that flourished in their time under the name of Yahweh: Baal, the altars, the groves, the high-places, the idols, graven images and molten images, the male and female prostitutes, the witches and wizards and "mutterers." But they went further. They looked at the solemn worship of Yahweh himself, and proclaimed that this ritual, for all its beauty and traditional sanctity, was not the essence of religion and never could be. Religion, they taught, can never consist in such mysterious acts, which are supposed to have a supernatural effect. One knows God and finds God as he affirms the divine law of life, the law of justice and love.

Wherewith shall I come before the Lord,  
And bow myself before the high God?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,  
With calves of a year old?

Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,  
Or with ten thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,  
The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

So the prophet enumerates the approved forms of his people's religion. Then with one stroke he sweeps them away:

He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good;  
And what doth the Lord require of thee,  
But to do justly, and to love mercy,  
And to walk humbly with thy God?

That is the highest—and only—requirement of prophetic religion: its content is not a magical transaction, but the quality of one's life and the pattern of one's conduct in one's everyday dealings: humility, mercy, justice.

One may ask: Does not this reduce religion to ethics? Why cannot one be just and merciful without any reference to God? This forces us to go deeper, and ask: What is religion?

Religion is man's conscious relating of his own life to the reality that creates, sustains, and outlasts his own life and every life. When I am speaking of "reality," I am not using it in any cryptic or esoteric sense. I mean here what the average man means by it when he speaks of trees and mountains and the people he knows as real things and real persons, while he thinks of ghosts and fairies as unreal. I mean by reality the world in which we live and move and have our being. Its characteristic feature is that it is "there," whether we like it or not, whether we recognize it or not, whether we accept it or not. It resists our wishes; it survives our doubts; it cuts across our illusions and smashes them in its own good time with the effortless, irresistible advance of a glacier or a tide. Religion is man's opportunity to come to terms with this reality, discover his oneness with it, and find through it meaning and value that far surpass his highest dreams.

To cross the threshold to this relationship man must pass through disillusionment. He must face death, and know the limits within which his individual life is relentlessly fixed. He must face sin, and acknowledge again and again the failure of his efforts, the undoing of his best intentions. In that moment he faces a terrible temptation: to escape from this reality with its obdurate laws, and find another



world, plastic to his wishes, obedient to his will—a world that allows him to break laws at will, turn stones into bread, throw himself unharmed from the pinnacle of the temple, and possess with one gesture all the kingdoms of the world. Would that he always knew in that fateful encounter that the voice he hears is not God's but the devil's: the voice of the creature denying the creator, claiming omnipotence, seeking to annex the world and make his self its center. It is not easy to recognize the tempter when he assumes the disguise of an angel of supernatural religion. God has been denied more often in the name of this religion than in the name of outright atheism.

But in those moments in which man avoids the devil's snare, and looks to reality, instead of away from it, he finds there the Power that has supported him all along, the Order that gives meaning and direction to his life, the Sovereign Goodness that claims loyalty and compels devotion. Religion is then his complete, single-minded, whole-hearted surrender to this Sovereign power, order, goodness. It is "giving one's life away"—the only way in which life can truly be found. It is an act of humility and trust: humility, because one sees oneself in the perspective of a vast creative process, infinitely more significant than anything one could claim for one's own isolated life; yet also trust, because one knows that one's life, short and imperfect as it is, can be at one with the power that shapes destiny. Justice and love, as we shall see, are the fruits of this religion. They are the pattern of human relations that grow out of conscious at-oneness with the creative pattern of reality.

One will find records of this religion in the discourses of the prophets, in the life and teachings of Jesus. But one may also catch glints of it in unexpected places, and recall gratefully that God never leaves himself without witness among men. In John Steinbeck's magnificent proletarian novel, *Grapes of Wrath*, Casy, the erstwhile preacher of magical religion, struggles with a new experience of the holy unity of life:

"I ain't sayin' I'm like Jesus," the preacher went on. "But I got tired like Him, an' I got mixed up like Him, an' I went into the wilderness like Him, without no campin' stuff. Nighttime I'd lay on my back an' look up at the stars; morning I'd set an' watch the sun come up; midday I'd look out from a hill at the rollin' dry country; evenin' I'd foller the sun down. Sometimes I'd pray like I always done. On'y I couldn' figure what I was prayin' to or for. There was the hills, an' there was me, an' we wasn't separate no more. We was one thing. An' that one thing was holy.

"An' I got thinkin', on'y it wasn't thinkin', it was deeper down than thinkin'. I got thinkin' how we was holy when we was one thing, an' mankin' was holy when it was one thing. An' it on'y got unholy when one mis'able little fella got the bit in his teeth an' run off his own way, kickin' an' draggin' an' fightin'. Fella like that bust the holiness. But when they're all workin' together, not one fella for another fella, but one fella kind of harnessed to the whole shebang—that's right, that's holy."

The test of mature religion is its ability to meet tragedy without fear. The stuff of tragedy is the destruction of human values—destruction that does not come capriciously or accidentally, but inevitably, irresistibly, according to an implacable order. Ego-centric omnipotence goes blind with terror in such a crisis. It cannot conceive how its dearest wishes could be so heartlessly crushed. Its single impulse is that of flight; to shut its eyes to this scene of desolation, and seek diversion, consolation, escape.

The Greeks were mature enough to accept tragedy. But their vision of tragedy was not free from fear. Their greatest myths lack the insight that nemesis is not a mysterious fate, but the intelligible order of reality; that men are not the puppets of supernatural forces, but victims of their own disregard of moral law. Oedipus' fate had been sealed by a curse before his birth. In the drama that bears his name he does nothing. His only act is to discover the fate that had



## CHAPTER II

### OUR FAITH AND DEMOCRACY

THAT the Christian faith sanctions and supports the democratic way of life is fast becoming a platitude. Therein lies our danger. A platitude, as the word suggests, is a flat truth: truth flattened out, deprived of its essential dimension of depth. Meaning never lies stretched out on a verbal surface. To find it one must go beneath the words, dig and tunnel through a whole mass of relevant facts and ideas. It is when men dislike or fear that kind of tunneling that they tolerate a platitude. It is a kind of unconscious insincerity. It keeps them from thinking the truth by enabling them to speak the truth without thinking about it. Our task in this chapter is to exchange a cheap platitude for a dangerous truth.

#### *1. The Essential Dignity of Every Man*

Listing the assumptions of democracy in a recent essay,<sup>1</sup> Professor Merriam, of the University of Chicago, puts first the belief "in the essential dignity of all men." Whence do we derive this idea? We do not get it from those gifted people who discovered the political institutions of democracy, won popular government, and coined the word for it. It was one of the symptoms of the instability of Greek democracy, and one of the causes of its failure, that it was never supported by a deep and wide-spread conviction in the dignity of the common man. This weakness is reflected in many expressions of Greek life.

Consider their drama. The theater of Periclean Athens is perhaps the most genuinely democratic theater in history, more democratic in some ways than were even the Federal

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<sup>1</sup> *The New Democracy and the New Despotism*, McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1939.

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Theater Projects of the New Deal. A public subsidy guaranteed the price of admission to every citizen who was in need of it. Sailors and artisans from the Peiraeus and peasants from outlying villages rubbed shoulders with high-born, wealthy Athenian aristocrats. A popular audience applauded the performance and awarded the prize. And what did they see and hear on the public stage, interpreting the tragic glory of the common life? The protagonists of that popular spectacle were the vanished rulers of a vanished kingdom: kings and queens, princes and princesses of the royal blood: Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, Orestes, and Electra; the royal houses of Mycenae, Thebes, and Athens. The common people had no part in the action of the tragedy. They appeared only in the chorus. They stood by as passive onlookers, commenting in helpless resignation on the events that befall their kings and queens.

The greatest Greek philosophers echo the same undemocratic estimate of human life. Even in his ideal *Republic*, Plato takes it for granted that the masses of the people must live in docile industry, with no voice in the decisions of the common life; the right of self-determination is reserved for a small minority of privileged intellectuals. Aristotle, suspicious of utopias and champion of common sense, criticizes his master. And the point of his criticism is not that Plato was too aristocratic, but that he was not aristocratic enough. Plato at least admitted the farmer, the artisan, the trader, and the sailor to the status of citizenship, though it was inferior citizenship. Aristotle would deny them that status altogether. Only the man of leisure, the man who lives entirely by the labor of others and can devote all his time to intellectual pursuits, is worthy to be a citizen of a free republic.

When we leave Athens for the Orient the picture grows incomparably worse. In the great states that bordered Palestine, the empires of the Nile and the Euphrates, men were accustomed to the most disgusting servility toward their social superiors. The tablets of the Amarna period preserve



letters written by the petty princes of Syria to their overlord, the King of Egypt. One of them reads:

Ammunira, the man of Beirut, thy servant, and the dust of thy feet (hath spoken), saying: At the feet of my lord the king, my Sun, my gods, the breath of my life, have I fallen down seven and seven times.

One chief after another addressing the Egyptian Pharaoh calls himself, "his house-dog, the footstool of his feet, the dust of his feet or sandals, the ground on which he treads; they bow seven times and seven times, on belly and on back."<sup>2</sup> The Egyptian Pharaoh is literally worshipped as a God. And an Assyrian saying goes,

The man is the shadow of God,  
The slave is the shadow of man,  
The king is like God.

When we turn from this to little Palestine the contrast is so striking as to be almost incredible. Let us recall a famous incident.

Ahab, the king of Israel, covets the vineyard of one of his subjects. He offers to buy it. But Naboth refuses the offer, knowing perhaps how unequal would be the bargain when the seller is a commoner and the buyer a king. He clings to a man's ancient right to refuse the alienation of the family land: "The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee." And the king is balked. There is nothing he can do about it. He goes home and sulks: "And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread."

Thus the commoner has rights, so clear-cut and so well established, that not even the king can override them. Remember who the king was: supreme authority, military, civil, political, and religious. No law should be able to stop him, for he is the law. That the crown can do no wrong is still

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<sup>2</sup> Quotations from S. A. Cook, in *Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol. II, p. 337.

preserved as a legal principle in a great modern commonwealth, though it be treated as a legal fiction in most cases today. It was no legal fiction in the Oriental kingdom. The king was legislature, judiciary, and executive; and the Lord's anointed as well, who could make and unmake high-priests. But in the little kingdom of Palestine this absolute monarch's power is limited by the commoner's inalienable rights.

Jezebel, the foreign queen, is not used to such inconvenient restrictions. "Doest thou now govern the kingdom of Israel?" she taunts her husband. She finds a way by which the king can really govern, that is, get the field. On Jezebel's instructions and with the connivance of the nobles of the capital, Naboth is accused of blasphemy and sedition, and stoned to death. So "Jezebel said to Ahab, Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead."

There must have been terrible indignation about this judicial murder. Years after, men speak of Ahab's successor as "the son of a murderer" (2 Kings 6: 32). But who could do anything about it? The aristocracy, the "elders and the nobles" of Jezreel had been a party to the murder. And there was no conceivable judicial procedure by which action could be taken against the king.

"But the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite." At the very moment when the king is taking possession of the murdered man's vineyard, Elijah is to meet him and deliver the following message:

Thus saith the Lord, Hast thou killed, and taken possession? . . .

In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth  
Shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine.

One will search in vain the literature of the ancient world to find anything like this. Elijah is not a priest. He has no official position of any sort. The terrible judgment he has



just delivered is sedition and lese-majesty. In any other Oriental court the king's guards would have struck him down immediately without even the formality of a trial; and if his death had been delayed, it would have been only to prolong it with torture. But here, the chronicle has it, the king of Israel accepts this divine verdict of the public conscience, delivered by a man whom he knows to be his enemy: "And it came to pass, when Ahab heard those words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly."

This story, I repeat, has no parallel in the literature of any other people before the rise of Christianity. But in the Old Testament its theme recurs in the utterances of its greatest religious figures. The protagonists of this drama are, on one hand, the common people; Uriah the Hittite, Naboth the Jezreelite, or the nameless multitudes of farmers who borrow money at exorbitant rates of interest, cannot pay it back, then lose their land, and have to sell their wives, their children, or their own persons into slavery; the innocent ones, who, as Amos puts it, are sold for silver, and the needy ones sold for a pair of shoes; those who cannot get justice, because their wealthy adversary can bribe the judge; those whose forced labor builds the king's luxurious palace; those who, in Isaiah's words, are plundered, crushed, ground down by oppression. And, on the other hand, the ruling classes: the king, the princes, the nobles, the "honorable men," the judges, the priests of the royal sanctuary, the haughty daughters of Zion; the owners of the great houses, the winter houses and the summer houses and the houses of ivory, "who store up violence and robbery in their palaces," who "join house to house and lay field to field, till there is no more room, and they are left to dwell alone in the midst of the land."

The prophets identify themselves and the God for whom they speak with the cause of the common people: "my people," they say, when they speak of them. John Henry Newman wrote to his friend Keble in the year 1830:

Things are in a bad way down here. The laboring population, as well as the farmers, seem thoroughly indifferent to the welfare of the parsons and squires.

So the prophets seem to be most of the time: indifferent to the welfare of the parsons and the squires of their time, wholly concerned with the lot of the laborers and farmers. They describe the oppression of the common people, and execrate their oppressors with an animus that has few equals in any literature, even that of the socialist agitator of our times. Micah thus addresses the "heads of Jacob, and the princes of the house of Israel":

Is it not for you to know judgment?  
Who hate the good and love the evil?  
Who pluck off their skin from off them,  
And the flesh from off their bones?  
Who also eat the flesh of my people,  
And flay their skin from off them;  
And break their bones, and chop them in pieces,  
As for the pot, and as flesh within the caldron.

The charge of extracting surplus-value from the workers is not harsher than this analysis of class-relations in terms of cannibalism.

## *2. Dignity, Responsibility, and Justice*

What makes the difference? Why this concern for the common man, this merciless condemnation of those who oppress him? One may say: Because the prophets are religious people, and look upon the life of their community with religious eyes. That is no answer. The Egyptians, too, were religious. And their religion enforced and perpetuated the servitude of millions to the power of a few. It was Egyptian religion that made Pharaoh a God. Other-worldly religion does not give dignity to the common man—either in Egypt, or elsewhere. At best it offers him a substitute for dignity, a consolation for the indignities he suffers in this life. Promising him spiritual equality in the future life, it encourages



him to put up with material and social inequality in this life. Other-worldly religion is authoritarian and autocratic. It subjects the common man to those who claim a monopoly over the lore of the supernatural, the methods of magic, and the symbols of sanctity.

Thank God for another kind of religion, a religion that was discovered not in the despotic empires of the Nile and the Euphrates, but in the close-knit community of the nomad! The very insecurity of the life of the desert forces people together in firm solidarity. Class distinctions have hardly the chance to solidify, because there is so little private property. Men can own there little more than the horses on which they ride, the weapons they use, the clothes they wear, and articles of personal adornment. Pasture lands and even herds are owned in common.<sup>3</sup>

The essential thing in this religion is not a mysterious act performed by one man, or a small class of men, on behalf of the whole community; it is an intelligible, reasonable service performed by every member of the community on his own behalf and on behalf of the whole community. It is an affirmation of a covenant, an understanding that the whole community makes with God, an agreement to obey God's law. There is nothing essentially magical about that law: it is the true basis of human conduct. And there is nothing essentially mysterious about it: the best human insight must be brought to bear upon it, re-interpret, and transform it with advancing understanding.

How does this confer dignity on the common man? Every man, be he king or peasant, is a covenanter with God. The observance of God's law is an act of free choice, which every man must make. Thus man is made in the image of God. God is a Creator. And man is also a creator: creator of his own life, co-creator of the common life. He has the dignity of a free spirit, freely choosing his destiny; and, *therefore*, the responsibility of a moral being, who must choose aright

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<sup>3</sup> See Adolphe Lods, *Israel from its Beginnings to the Middle of the Eighth Century*, pp. 195ff. and 396ff.

in order to safeguard the rightness of the common life. Dignity and responsibility are inseparable; neither can exist apart from the other. If we expect responsibility from the common man, we must first accord him the conditions of dignity. Hence the prophet's persistent demand for justice, righteousness, rightness in human relations. For any man who is unjust to his neighbor violates the conditions of the common covenant with God: he sins against God and the common life; and any other man has the right to protect God's broken law on God's behalf. That protest is not a plea to the oppressor to show kindness, nor a promise of consolation to the oppressed. It is a demand that duties be fulfilled and rights respected.

Every religion offers the common folk that God at least will pity them, if no one else will. Even the most corrupt religions in their better moments ask for mercy for the poor, foster kindness, and enjoin charity. Many offerings of ancient and modern religion are monuments to the complacent generosity of the rich. The typical Egyptian *stele* runs:

I gave bread to the hungry, clothes to the naked. I was one whom his father loved and his brethren approved.

The dedications of the poor are, of course, rarer, and they breathe a different spirit of gratitude and humility:

Thou art Ammon, the lord of him who is silent, coming at the call of the poor. I called to thee when I was in trouble, and thou didst come and didst save me; thou didst give breath to the poor and didst rescue me who was in bondage. . . .<sup>4</sup>

That is as far as Egyptian religion goes: the cry to the "lord of the silent." What it lacks is the cry to the Lord of Justice, who "strengtheneth the spoiled against the strong, so that the spoiled shall come against the fortress."

I would not underestimate the moral value of charity. We have come to recognize at last that he who ignores the

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<sup>4</sup>Quoted by T. Eric Peet, *Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol. II, p. 208.



suffering of a fellow-creature destroys within his very self essential qualities of civilized life—qualities that measure the difference between humanity and brutality. Only the most advanced forms of human life permit the growth of humanitarian movements and humane societies.

Yet there is one thing that charity lacks: the assumption of equality. One can be generous to inferiors just as well as, or, rather, better than, to one's equals: be kind to one's slave as much as to one's brother, be kind to animals as much as to men. In fact, there is a special appeal to mercy from the weak and the helpless. Their dependence flatters the love of power, which assumes in kindness one of its frequent disguises. There are people who would rather help the poor man's cat, than the poor man's wife or child. England, that paradise of private charities, has a delightful tag-day for "Assistance to the Sick Animals of the Poor." When I first saw it in Oxford the idea struck me as so incongruous that I could hardly restrain an irreverent grin. But one look from a matron, descending from her bicycle to drop a lordly six-pence into a collector's box, was enough to make me realize what serious business this was.

The characteristic of charity is that it can be solicited as a gratuity, but cannot be demanded as a right. The prospective giver has a perfect right to refuse. What he does give is not obligation but largesse. And that is why the prophets have, on the whole, so little use for it. They do not beg. They demand. They do not humor the powerful and the rich; they do not mollify them with spiritual tribute, and coax them with the promise of moral reward. When they plead the cause of the oppressed, they do not plead at all. A recurrent note of harshness, denunciation, and threats runs through their prophecies. To make threats when you ask for charity would be ridiculous; and, if it was serious, it would be blackmail. But when you ask for justice you have to threaten. You have to say: The integrity of the common life is imperilled; if the poor man does not get his rights, we shall all be destroyed, for the moral structure that up-

holds our community is undermined. That is what the prophets said. And their thought for the common man was not humanitarian sorrow for his misfortune, but anger at his outraged dignity.

### 3. *The Greatness of the Worker*

Does Jesus belong to this tradition?

Whatever else Jesus did or failed to do for the common people who came under his influence, he brought them a sense of dignity. Here are the words of an early disciple. They echo the prophetic tradition in its most truculent mood. There is a peculiar irony in the fact that these words should have found a place in the Prayer Book of aristocratic churches of later Christendom:

My soul doth magnify the Lord,  
And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour . . .

He hath showed strength with his arm;  
He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

He hath put down the mighty from their seats,  
And exalted them of low degree.

He hath filled the hungry with good things;  
And the rich he hath sent empty away.

The poor man who wrote these words—I doubt whether any one but a poor man could have written them—was not sorry for himself.

That is perhaps the greatest thing Jesus did for the common people who were his followers: He did not feel sorry for them. The attitude of pity corrodes respect. You can not sincerely honor those whom you permanently pity. So Jesus did not weep for the poor: "Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." It is for the rich that he was anxious and disturbed. It was so hard for them to enter the kingdom; they could only enter as if by a miracle, if at all. If Jesus knew this, why did he not undertake a special mis-



sion to call them away from their over-full barns and great possessions? Why did he leave to remote followers the work of the Salvation Army in evening dress? Because he thought it was no use: Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. And when he gave them a chance to get rid of their treasure, they would not do it; they went away sorrowful. Or else, they were too busy. You make a feast; you invite all the big men of the town. And at the last minute they want to be excused; they have married a wife, they have bought a field, they are trying out new oxen. Then you are forced to send to the highways, and the byways, to collect the maimed, the halt, and the blind. So the poor are paradoxically blessed. They are ready for the kingdom, not because they have special virtues, but because they have not been unfitted for it by selfish treasure and the illusion of superiority. For the basis of the kingdom is equality: the essential equality that every man inalienably possesses, no matter what may be his present status.

This might have remained a riddle or have passed for a pious hope, were it not for Jesus' perfectly clear explanation. Jesus goes deeper than any of the prophets; he completes their work and surpasses it when he raises the question that no prophet had put explicitly: What constitutes the measure of human greatness? He considers two possible answers:

You know that those who are supposed to rule the heathen lord it over them, and their great men tyrannize over them. But so shall it not be among you.

But whosoever wants to be great among you must be your servant,

And whosoever wants to hold the first place among you must be everybody's slave.

Goodspeed's translation brings out the full meaning of that harsh word *doulos*, which the King James version softens into "servant." The contrast that Jesus draws here could not be more striking. Here is the top of the social pyramid: Caesar, the man of absolute power, in so far as human power

can ever be absolute, the man of unlimited wealth, in so far as wealth can be that, the man who lords it over millions and tyrannizes an empire. And there is the bottom: the despised, ignorant, degraded slave. *He* is the pattern of human greatness. If you want to be great, you must be like him.

Why so? What is it that makes the slave great, and Caesar small? The slave is a worker. He gives away the most precious thing he can give: his labor, his life. And that is human greatness: to weave the single thread of your own life into the pattern of the community, and discover its own meaning in the common destiny; to find life in spending it; to realize life in giving it away. That is the uniquely human thing we have: our community, our unity one with another. The worker illustrates that principle, for his life is a constant pouring out of his own strength in order to make possible the common necessities, the common values of our everyday life. He is the prototype of human greatness. There is no human greatness about the ability to overpower others. A brute can overpower a man; and a man who seeks that kind of pre-eminence finds only brutal supremacy, but never human dignity. If Caesar wants to be great, he must descend, or rather ascend, to the level of the worker, and give his life in service. He must recognize the equal greatness of the other workers in the community. He must hold himself, and be held by others, not as master of all, but as servant of all. That is the pattern of my own life, Jesus continues. The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, to be worked for, but to minister, to work for others, and to give his life a ransom for many. The pagan lord can live only by dominating others. The price of his leisure is others' toil; the price of his freedom others' bondage. But my life is different. I live only to work for others, to liberate others. With my life I pay the price of their liberation, the ransom of their release.

I do not know any idea in history that is more revolutionary than this idea that Jesus taught and lived: that the measure of human greatness is not one's ability to dominate, but



one's ability to serve. In so far as this idea is accepted by men, the structure of society is altered, the conditions of human life are transformed. The feeble and faltering extent to which we have accepted it is the measure of our democracy. In the political field, though not yet in economic life, we have recognized power as a public utility, government as a public service, and our governors as public servants. That is political democracy. It is one of the few genuinely Christian things about our society. We can repudiate it only by returning to the pagan idea that political authority belongs to him who is strong enough to seize and hold it by brute force; that the greatest man is he who can dominate the greatest number of people, impose his will upon them, demand blind obedience from them, and command their respect through the flaunting of his power.

Here then is our answer to the question that forms the topic of this chapter: What connection has Christian faith with democracy? Our Christian tradition, and perhaps no other, asserts the essential dignity of every man. Every man has dignity as a free moral agent if he affirms in his own personal choice the covenant that makes the common life possible. Every man has dignity as a worker if he gives his life in service that makes the common life actual. The first is the backbone of the prophetic demand for justice. The second is the substance of Jesus' gospel of love. Justice affirms every man's right to be respected as a man, as an end in himself, never as a mere means to others' ends. Love affirms every man's destiny to find life for himself only as he gives his life in service to the whole community. Democracy has meaning only in so far as that kind of love forms its motive and that kind of justice its goal.

## CHAPTER III

### IS OUR FAITH REAL?

I WISH to raise now a question that is not mentioned by many religious writers: the problem of unreal faith. A man may accept the truth and not have faith in it. A man may accept the truth, knowing that it is of the highest human importance, and still have no faith in it. You and I may believe, as I suppose every Christian does, that God is love, yet have no faith in the God who is love. Is it possible that we may mean to have this faith, that we may think that we possess it, yet be as destitute of it as the man who flatly denies the proposition that God is love? Yes, it is possible. How is it possible? That is what we must discover in this chapter.

#### *1. What Faith Is Not, and What It Is*

If the average person was asked to explain what he understands by religious faith, he would give one or both of two definitions:

(a) Faith is a body of beliefs publicly certified by some religious body. It is the body of doctrine that all "believers" must accept, that only heretics or infidels doubt or deny. You need not think through it for yourself; you need not think about it at all. I recall a conversation with one who was considered an exemplar of such faith:

"What is your faith about X?"

"I believe what the church believes."

"But do you know what the church believes about X?"

"No."

"And you believe it?"

"Certainly."

(b) Faith is a body of beliefs lacking the usual evidence that one demands in all other beliefs. We all know the defi-



nition of faith offered by the Sunday-school pupil: "Faith is believing something you know isn't true." This is usually quoted as a funny story. Humorous or not, it is indistinguishable from the view of certain eminent writers and theological professors: "*Credo quia absurdum*," I believe because it is absurd, they quote with approval. Many Christians who would not go to such heroic lengths would still say: Faith is believing something that you do not know to be true.

I suggest that neither of these brings out the essence of faith. There is some truth in either of them, but it is not even a half-truth. Both are very far indeed from the sense in which we all use the word in everyday life. "I have faith in my friend, in my bank, my doctor." What do we mean when we say this?

(a) Obviously we do not mean publicly certified belief. Public certification is all to the good. But it is not necessary; and it is absurd to demand it in certain instances, like that of the friend.

(b) Neither do we mean lack of knowledge. The more I know of my friend, the better. If I believed in him knowing nothing about him, my faith would be baseless and probably foolish.

So faith is knowledge. But it is not mere knowledge. It is knowledge on which I am prepared to risk myself in action. To have faith in the bank means: I know enough about it to trust it with my money. To have faith in my friend means: I know enough of him to trust him with my reputation, my honor, my affection. That is the essential thing about faith: the venturesomeness of conviction that leads to risky action. The opposite of faith is not knowledge. It is fear. "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" Faith is confidence. It is trust.

Why the element of risk? Because there is no action without risk. Even in the most secure situations, the knowledge on which we act lacks certainty. Hundreds of people are listening to an address in a public hall. They all have faith in the safety of the building, else they would not stay long

in it. But can they prove with perfect certainty that the roof will not come tumbling down, that a time-bomb will not explode in the middle of it, that an earthquake will not start half-way through the meeting? They have evidence that these things will not happen. But the evidence is not complete, and never can be. Even if the survey of the facts were ideally exhaustive, there would still remain the interval between the end of the survey and the moment of action, when anything might happen. All we can ask for is "reasonably" complete evidence—a balance of favorable evidence sufficient for "all practical purposes." It is foolish to take unnecessary risks; it is even more foolish to ask for immunity from inevitable risks.

Ordinarily we take these risks, and think nothing of it. We start eating, without proof that the food is not poisoned. We begin a sentence with sublime (and all-too-often unjustified) confidence in our ability to complete it. Every meal, every sentence, every step, every sleep is an act of faith. If faith is lost, these acts become impossible. There are people who cannot sleep, for they have no faith that they can. There are people who will not eat for fear of being poisoned, and have to be tube-fed. There are others who will not venture in a company of strangers for fear of being hurt, or bored, or ignored. This paralyzing faithlessness is of a piece with the illusion of omnipotence. It is the desire for an impossible security, a magical protection against the possibility of humiliation or defeat. That is why faith is the supreme evidence of the mature religious attitude towards reality. It means humility and trust; the open, defenceless, adventurous spirit that braves necessary perils in order to explore unknown possibilities.

## *2. The Test of Faith: Action*

How do I know whether I have such faith? There is only one certain test, and that is action.

I think I was about thirteen when I first learned the back dive. To a boy who was not much of an athlete this was



quite an accomplishment. No sense of false modesty kept me back from displaying it at every opportunity. Then one day something happened to a friend of mine, an older boy, a better athlete than myself, who had taught me the back dive. He must have slipped while taking off. He threw himself high, but not so far out as usual. There was a split second in which I was certain that he would smash the back of his head against the diving board. His head missed it. But he scratched his back badly, and had to spend days in the hospital. From that time I have never done the back dive. But for a long time I still believed that I could. I assured everybody, including myself, that I could do it if I wanted to. But I always had to add that, for some reason or other, I did not want to do it today. So my faith in my ability to do the back dive was unreal, though it seemed to be perfectly sincere. It was a fraud, though never a deliberate fraud. And the proof of its unreality was at the point of action.

Religious faith stands on exactly the same ground. By taking upon myself the name of Christian, I profess faith in the Christian God, the God who is love. Is that faith real or is it a fraud? I do not know. There is only one way by which the true answer can be known: by observing my action. Do I act as though that were the truth about the world: that the reality at work about me, determining the structure of human life, compelling the nature of human destiny, the power that must be recognized in every ultimate decision, affirmed in every major choice, is the power of love at work in the world; that my life and the life of my fellows cannot achieve its highest potentialities of freedom, dignity, depth, security, adventure, humor, tenderness, beauty, except in love and through love? Is that my faith? Look at my acts, and you will know whether I am bluffing or mean what I say.

One of the greatest insights of Jesus, perhaps his most original insight, was a clear, explicit grasp of this very truth: "By their fruits ye shall know them." And the fruit that he

demanding of those who professed religious faith was a special type of act, out of the beaten track of their usual occupations, an unusual and exacting choice that could be avoided by everyone except the person who had that faith.

Jesus could not have made this point more sharply than in the story of the Good Samaritan. His interlocutor is a "lawyer," an expert interpreter of the religious law. He raises the fundamental question of religion: What shall I do to inherit eternal life? He asks, What shall I *do?* not, as a Greek or a modern Westerner would probably have asked, What shall I believe? Here is at least one common premise between the rabbis of the time and Jesus: They all belong to a tradition that asserts the primacy of action in religious faith. And as the conversation proceeds it is obvious that they have a good deal more in common. They agree at once that the essence of religion consists in two things: Thou shalt love the Lord with all thy heart, soul, strength, and mind; and thy neighbor as thyself. It is the lawyer who quotes these two great requirements. Jesus is in perfect agreement. He has nothing to add. "Thou hast answered right. This do and thou shalt live."

The full importance of this agreement has not been sufficiently emphasized. There is a wide-spread impression even among thoughtful Christians that Jesus brought a new theology into the world. Many Christians, for example, labor under the misapprehension that the doctrines of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man are original contributions of Jesus. This very passage would suggest that they are not. And a careful study of the teachings of the Jewish rabbis of that time shows that they parallel the theological teachings of Jesus at vital points. They too believed that God is a Father; that his care extends to all; that he sees all and hears their prayer; that his love never fails, but is ever open to those who repent and forgive.<sup>1</sup> In formal

<sup>1</sup> See the writer's "Jesus and Conflict with the Pharisees," in the quarterly *Christendom* (Chicago), Winter, 1937.



theology, even in formal ethics, Jesus is in close agreement with his bitter opponents. But somehow they differ irreconcilably on the meaning of religion. "Who is my neighbor?" asks the lawyer. There the disagreement emerges.

There is a man on the lonely road. Nothing is said about him, except that he is a man, wounded, helpless, the victim of human cruelty, in desperate need of human help. A priest and a levite pass, and pass by. They of all people believed in love of God and love of man. They publicly professed that faith; they celebrated it in their sacred rites. But they pass by the man who fell among the thieves. The Samaritan, on the other hand, has no claim to correctness of doctrine or worship. There is no explicit reference to religion in his act. All we are told is that he had compassion on the wounded man: common human pity. Then follows a string of verbs of action, describing what he *did*, as he fulfilled the great commandment, while the others failed.

The contrast could not be clearer. The priest and the levite think they have faith in love. But their action in this critical instance—their relation not to familiar friends, not to persons of the same class and walk of life, but to the unknown victim of other men's cruelty—that action shows that they lack the faith they think they have. The Samaritan may not know that this is his faith. But his acts show that he does have it.

### 3. *What Is Hypocrisy?*

Is this making too much of a single parable? Let us look at its wider context. The parable of the Good Samaritan is an episode in a conflict that runs right through Jesus' recorded career: from the earliest days in Galilee to his execution on the cross. That conflict seems so puzzling when one recalls that the scribes and Pharisees were not the black-dyed villains of Sunday-school melodrama, but as high-minded and public-spirited a class of men as any group of popular religious leaders of other periods. In personal character they would compare favorably with our protestant clergy

today. How account for the violence of Jesus' attack on them? Was it not grossly unfair, and singularly inconsistent with his own command to love one's enemies and bless one's persecutors? How explain this apparent lapse?

What was it that Jesus could not forgive in them as a class, though he forgave them as his personal enemies? Did he charge them with teaching the wrong kind of faith? No. Their faith was not wrong. It was unreal. That was the substance of his charge: hypocrisy. John Macmurray calls attention to the literal meaning of that word: play-acting.

Most Christians I know take that accusation to mean: conscious insincerity; deliberate deceit; intentional assumption of a false exterior. This too is melodrama. It is not true to human nature. Conscious insincerity is a negligible factor in human conduct. It cannot be sustained, for it destroys one's self-respect. Greater than the need of impressing others with our virtue is the need of impressing ourselves. Only a cold-blooded villain, or a consummate actor, can deceive others successfully without first deceiving himself. The average man can play a rôle convincingly in real life only when he has first managed to convince himself.

There are indications in the records that Jesus realized this. When the Pharisee recites his virtues in the Temple, there is no conscious deception in his prayer. He is not addressing a prayer-meeting, but God, whom he believes to know all and see all, God whom he could never hope to fool as he might his gullible fellows. The Pharisee's prayer expresses sincerely his habitual self-awareness. And what he says is perfectly true. He is not an extortioner; he is not an adulterer. He is not like that publican. He does tithe all that he possesses; he does fast twice a week. His accomplishments are perfectly real. His performance measures up to his professions. But he is a hypocrite just the same. His prayer is not real prayer, though he thinks it is. He is not fooling God, and may not be fooling anyone else. But he is fooling himself. That is why he is a hypocrite. He is not really living. He is acting a part. He cannot be natural,



even when he is by himself. Even before God he cannot be real. Why not? What is the cause of this unintended unreality that haunts him even in his most intimate solitude? The answer is in the closing words of the parable: "For everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased." The source of his unreality is pride, the pride of class.

I remember sitting in a conference of very learned people on the topic of class stratification and class conflict. The first question was naturally: What is a social class? None of the proposed answers had been received with much enthusiasm. In the last day of the conference John Macmurray ventured the suggestion: An upper class is a group of people who act unnaturally. A famous economist sitting a few seats away from me snorted when he heard this. But I have often thought of it as one of the few glints of insight in that discussion. It may not be a definition of an upper class; but it is certainly part of the truth; from the moral and religious point of view it may be the most interesting part. It throws light on the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees. The unreality of their religion was the unnatural behavior of a privileged class.

I do not mean to suggest that the average scribe was as wealthy as the average publican. Certainly not. But the publicans were a tiny minority. The great masses of the people were then, as they are now, poor. Poverty means endless drudgery or extreme economic insecurity, or both. The scribes and the priests were exempt from both. The price of their exemption, the price of their leisure and security, was this religion that they practised so scrupulously: the priests got the tithes and other religious taxes that went to the support of the Temple; the scribes got prestige, and a living, through their monopolistic knowledge of the intricate and minute provisions of the law; the Pharisees got their political influence through their repute for piety. Thus it was their religion that separated this spiritual aristocracy from the rest of the people and made them in some degree a social aristocracy as well. In and through the religion of

love they maintained exclusive privileges that led inevitably to the assumption of superiority and the attitude of contempt for the common people.

G. F. Moore suggests the separation of the *talmide hakhaim*, the possessors of religious learning, from the *am ha-ares*, the uneducated masses:

The educated constituted a social class, and in their own estimate the most respectable class in the community. They looked down on the masses not only as unlearned but as ill-bred, rude and dirty. An educated man should therefore not marry a woman of this class . . . 'for they are loathsome and their women are unclean vermin.' . . . The word of the Law, 'Cursed is the man who lies with any beast,' is applied to the marriage of the scholar with a woman of the people.

And the common people reciprocated heartily:

Rabbi Akiba said of himself: "When I was an *am ha-ares*, I used to say, 'I wish I had one of those scholars, and I would bite him like an ass.' " His disciples said, "You mean like a dog." He replied, "An ass's bite breaks the bone; a dog's does not!"<sup>2</sup>

Here then is the source of hypocrisy:

They love to go in long clothing,  
And salutations in the market-place,  
And the chief seats in the synagogues,  
And the uppermost rooms at feasts:  
Which devour widows' houses,  
And for a pretence make long prayers.

—all this, as the accredited ministers of the religion of love. Their belief is: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

<sup>2</sup> Moore's Appendix on *Am Ha ares* in Kirsopp Lake and Foakes Jackson, *Beginnings of Christianity*, Vol. I, pp. 439-444. Perhaps I should add that Moore is describing a period fifty years or more after the death of Jesus. But it may fairly be taken as an indication of social tendencies that had been developing for generations before the Fall of Jerusalem.



Their conduct is: chief seats, best places, widows' houses. And what is the result?

#### 4. *Fantastic Religion*

Anyone looking with fresh eyes at their religion would be struck by its grotesque unreality: the grotesque unreality of magic. That is how it seems to have struck Jesus. Let us recall one of his metaphors: A man is just about to have a drink of water. He is a purist, anxious to exclude all foreign matter. So he fusses about and very carefully picks out a tiny gnat in it, so small as to be hardly visible. But there is a camel in the cup, a whole camel, hairy neck, caloused knees, hump, tail, and all. And he never sees it. And while he drinks, squinting anxiously down his nose into the cup to detect any residual impurity, down goes the camel. The whole thing is preposterous. A child would see that it is. But the scribe does not, for all his erudition and gray hairs. He insists that minute details of ceremonial are essential to religion itself. The proper comment on that kind of thing is that it is fantastic. You would expect it in a show, but it is incredible in real life.

Take the Sabbath, for example, one of the sorest points in the relations of Jesus to the pious Pharisees. What is the real meaning of the Sabbath? That is, what meaning has it that makes sense? It is a day of rest once a week. Who needs that rest? Not the people who rest the whole week and the whole month and the whole year; not the people who never work, but the people who are always at work. It is the worker who needs that day, and the religious theory on which it is based is that God too is a worker. God worked six days, he rested on the seventh. Every worker has an equal right to one day's rest. That is perhaps the earliest antecedent of social legislation: the earliest limitation of working hours. It recognizes the dignity of the worker, and protects it.

And what do the scribes make of the Sabbath? Instead of

lightening the worker's load, they increase it with absurd casuistic regulations about what he may or may not do on the Sabbath day:

He was guilty of Sabbath desecration who carried out so much food as was equal in weight to a dry fig, or so much wine as was enough for mixing in a goblet, or milk enough for one swallow, honey enough to put upon a wound, paper enough to write a custom-house notice upon, ink enough to write two letters. . . . A cripple might, according to Rabbi Meir, go out with his wooden leg. Rabbi Joses, on the other hand, does not allow it. . . . It is forbidden to read by lamplight on the Sabbath, or to cleanse clothing from vermin.<sup>3</sup>

What happens when you try to do this sort of thing? You cannot keep it up. Sooner or later you are forced to contradict yourself. That is what Jesus told the scribes and Pharisees. Here is a man who wants to be healed on the Sabbath. Healing is work. So, according to the best religious opinion of the day, Jesus must not heal him. What is Jesus' reply? "If your sheep or your ass fell into a well on the Sabbath day, what would you do?" The scribes would say: "How unfair to bring that up. That is not a matter of principle. It is a matter of necessity." And Jesus would answer: "Just so. It is a matter of necessity, which compels you to be your real self, and stop acting a part. And the interesting thing is that you call it necessity when it touches your pocketbook. It becomes a matter of necessity when you are in danger of losing so many shekels through the drowning of a sheep. But it is not a matter of necessity when human life is in danger. Economic loss constitutes a matter of necessity; human loss does not constitute a matter of necessity. Yet the Sabbath was not made for things. It was made for man."

I can see one loophole for the scribe. He can say: "I am not suggesting that you should not heal this man at all.

<sup>3</sup>E. Schuerer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, Division II, Vol. II, pp. 100-101. Edinburgh, 1890.



Only must you do it on the Sabbath? Why can't you wait till tomorrow?"

Years ago a certain vegetable vendor used to come to our house almost every Monday. I do not know whether my mother disliked the man or his vegetables. He would ring the bell, look up and ask, "How about some nice fresh vegetables today?" And invariably mother would answer, "Tomorrow." But he came only on Mondays. So one day I finally asked her, "Mother, why do you say that?" To which she very properly replied: "Because I don't want any of his vegetables, and he won't be here tomorrow."

The parallel with the scribe is not quite complete. My mother knew that "tomorrow" meant "never," but the scribe did not. And who, would you say, was the bigger hypocrite of the two? I should say: the scribe. My mother and the vegetable man understood each other very well. Her "tomorrow" meant a clear-cut "no" to him. It did not arouse any false hopes. But the scribe's "tomorrow" did not mean anything clear-cut at all. The scribe did not assume any responsibility about seeing to it that it should really happen tomorrow. His responsibility was confined to the demand that it should not happen today. So his "tomorrow" was a real negation excused by an unreal affirmation. That was his hypocrisy.

Hence the point of Jesus' other question in this discussion: "Is it lawful to do good, or to do harm? To save a life, or to kill?" On the face of it this seems absurdly irrelevant and unjust. The scribes never counselled wrong-doing and murder on the Sabbath. All they asked of Jesus is that he wait and do his good deed the following morning; not that he should do harm now, but merely do nothing. Jesus replies that there is no such middle ground between good and evil; that you cannot do nothing; that if you do not save a life now, when it is within your power to save it, then you are not doing nothing, you are doing something, you are a murderer. For you cannot be sure about tomorrow. There may be other work then, other lives to save. If a life is at stake

now, now is the time to save it. You would feel the force of this logic if your own life were in peril, or the life of your child. And if this man with the withered hand were as close to you as your brother, if you loved him as yourself, you would not feel that there is all the time in the world, and tomorrow morning is as good as now. It is because you are separated from him by the walls of your social privilege that you take this legalistic piffle about the Sabbath more seriously than his welfare. Your social privilege is the cause of your religious unreality.

The way out is perfectly clear. If you wish to recover religious reality you must wipe out this system of privileged classes. You must get a new kind of religion that does not create spiritual snobbishness and does not tolerate social divisions. You must repent, change your mind, change your ways. You must have faith in a kingdom that is founded not on superiority, but on equality: where the first shall be last and the last first; where the servant is greatest, and the worker comes first.

Jesus had faith in such a kingdom; that is, he acted on it. He identified himself with the *am ha-ares*, those despised people of the land, whose women were "unclean vermin" in the eyes of the religious aristocracy, the people of whom the great Hillel had said: "No am ha-ares is religious."<sup>4</sup> His fellowship with publican and sinner, impossible for the Pharisee, inevitable for Jesus, involved the rejection of all the appurtenances of magic that elevated the religious élite above the common people.

It involved also the rejection of all other causes of class division. Though his main battle was with religious snobs, he does not appear to have compromised with the rich. Where their treasure is, there will their heart be. A private treasure divides them from the dispossessed. Those who have faith in the community of love must get rid of their private possessions. So the rich young ruler who would enter the

<sup>4</sup> Quoted by G. F. Moore in *Judaism*, Vol. II, p. 160.



kingdom is asked to sell all that he has and give to the poor: not to give charity, but to give all. So the early Christian community turned to common ownership as the material expression of their faith in love. The experiment failed. But the important thing is that it was tried; that the original impact of Jesus' life and teaching on his first disciples led to the most drastic sharing of life and property.

### 5. *Our Predicament*

The moral of this discussion is all too plain.

A friend of mine, a decent pagan, asked: "Why are you a Christian?" I replied: "Because I believe in love." He said: "Don't you feel like a prig when you say that?" I had to admit that I do. But why?

I go back, think through the meaning of love once again. No, there is no other way of life that will stand comparison with it. Stoic self-sufficiency, Nietzschean will-to-power, Bentham's pleasure-calculus, Epicurus' delicate self-protection against pain—these philosophies, and others, break down where they miss the truth that one can find life only by losing it. I know the substitutes for love that men have tried throughout history, and their dismal results. I know from my own experience that the only thing that makes life human, to say nothing of making it noble, is love. Without love there can be no humanity, only brutality. Then why this inner uncertainty when I declare my faith in it? Why does the clean eye of this pagan detect a lurking unreality, a kind of involuntary humbug, in my statement of faith? There is humbug somewhere. But there is nothing wrong with love. That is the law of life by every standard of analysis and observation that I have ever used to test it. The humbug is in him who professes it, and in the world of which he is a part.

Here I am now at my typewriter. It is a new machine. I paid nearly fifty dollars cash for it last week. I am working in the living-room. It is hot upstairs in the study. And I am putting up stoically with the inconvenience of moving

my work into the living-room. Not far away from here a family of seven live in one room: that is their *living-room*—study, parlor, bed-room, kitchen, bath-room, guest-room, store-room. In my dwelling there are two and one-half rooms per person; in theirs, by the same count, one-seventh of a room per person.

Coming out of a restaurant, I see a man on the street stooping to pick up a cigarette-butt. My eyes follow him. Twenty steps away he stoops again for a cigarette-butt. I have just finished a sixty-cent lunch.

I know all the standard explanations, and some original ones as well, which make it perfectly clear that there is nothing to worry about in the fact that some men have surfeit while others go hungry, that one man can have a ten-room mansion to himself while scores of families on relief live in rat-infested holes long condemned by the health officer. I have heard them all: from gentle souls, their voices trembling when they speak of the ills of our troubled world, but recovering an unwonted firmness to insist that relief recipients deserve no better than they get, documenting their view with a story of the man on relief they saw walking into a worthless moving-picture show; and from hard-headed, though not hard-hearted, people, a little impatient with all this fuss about present-day poverty, when, all in all, things are so much better than they used to be. And I know the most plausible of all excuses, with which all these people wind up the argument with their conscience: "Tomorrow."

And all these explanations are unconvincing. They would convince the Pharisee, but they would not convince the man with the withered hand. When the priest and the levite passed by the man who fell among the thieves they did so, no doubt, for excellent reasons. I could scarcely escape their hypocrisy by improving on their reasons for passing by.

Yet I cannot help but pass by. I may give charity, but I know that charity, a tragic necessity, can be only a fraudulent substitute for love. I may give all my goods to the poor, but I know that this would feed only a very few poor for a



very few meals, and could never establish genuine mutuality between us. In the world in which I live the man who fell among the thieves numbers millions, and the thieves know how to derive further advantage from private kindness to their victims. I see no way out of that predicament. I will stay in my place, they will keep theirs. I will have privileges; they will lack necessities. I know that love means the free, unstinting sharing of what I have with those I love, not because I pity their misery but because I respect their dignity. It would be sheer sentimentalism to pretend that this kind of sharing is possible between us. An impassable barrier prevents it. It is not of their making, nor mine. But it is there. And so long as we let it stand, faith in love will lack the substance of action, and no one can profess it without a measure of hypocrisy.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE REPUDIATION OF OUR FAITH

OUR problem as Christians is the unreality of our faith: We have a faith in love that is no faith, because we cannot live it out. And a faith that is not a living faith is a pious fraud. The solution must be a choice between two possibilities: We can keep our faith, and change our practice. Or we can keep our practice, and change our faith.

It seems sacrilegious to suggest the latter of these alternatives, for it involves an abandonment of the Christian faith. So far we have never dared consider it. This, too, is part of our unreality. Today we are forced to consider it. For it is happening. It is the choice of the rulers of one of the most highly developed, most civilized nations of the world. What is happening there has an obvious political significance. It has a deeper religious significance. We must try to find it.

Some readers may feel disappointed at this turn of the discussion. They may think: Have we not heard enough tirades against Hitler already? There will be no tirades here. Bluster, invective, abuse in such a discussion as this would be a sign of weakness, of fear, of lack of clarity, to say nothing of lack of charity. Those who talk, for example, as though the German people were inherently incapable of democratic government, reveal a fascist frame of mind in their very attack upon their fascist opponents. To say that the German people are a brutal race is as much an acceptance of the racial myth as the Nazi alternative that the Germans are a race of supermen. Such attacks against fascism can only assist the spread of a fascist mentality in other lands.

The impression has been created in democratic countries that the Nazis are atheists. This is grossly untrue. The Nazis have nothing against God, though they have many grievances against the churches. On the contrary, they are



very much in favor of God. Hitler conceives of his own life as an instrument of God's will: "In resisting the Jews I am fighting to accomplish the work of the Lord."<sup>1</sup> On the sincerity of that profession of faith in God I cannot comment. But it is made and made often. And with regard to the church the Nazi position seems perfectly clear: So long as the churches stick to their own business, they will not be interfered with. The churches, writes Rosenberg,

have fundamentally but one task, that of making known to those men upon whom they have a claim the Church's belief in the Beyond. The earth on which they live is no longer in the least the affair of the Church.<sup>2</sup>

So Christian faith clashes with Nazi views only when it invades "the earth on which men live." What then? What are the points of conflict? Here is a unique opportunity to find out what there is about Christianity that is irreconcilable with the fascist way of life. We have heard the Christian version of that conflict often enough. It is more instructive to find out what the Nazis themselves fear and hate in the Christian tradition. There are times when we can learn more about Christianity from the children of darkness than from the children of light.

### 1. Jewish Humility

The first thing that the Nazis reject in Christianity is the doctrine that the model of human greatness is the worker rather than the man of power. The real Jesus, Rosenberg

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations from Hitler are from the unabridged English translation of *Mein Kampf*, or else from excerpts cited in *Hitler the Man and Racial Conception of the World*, "Friends of Europe" pamphlets, Numbers 34 and 37.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by a German pastor in the leading article of the *Hibbert Journal*, October, 1938. Alfred Rosenberg is, next to Hitler himself, the supreme authority for the Nazi world-view. His chief work is *Mythus des XX Jahrhunderts*. No English translation exists. Quotations in this chapter are taken from *Rosenberg's Positive Christianity*, "Friends of Europe" pamphlet, Number 27. See also Numbers 44, 46, and 48 in the same series for further extracts from Rosenberg's *Mythus*.

tells us, is "the Hero, not the bruised one." The suffering servant, the man who identified himself with the poor, the hungry, the captives, the broken-hearted, the man who joined issue with the established powers of his day, was defeated and crucified—this is the Jewish Christ. The German Christ is not a servant, but an imperious master; not a defeated man, but a lordly victor:

The powerful preacher and angry one in the Temple, the Man who tore them away and whom "they all" followed . . . not the Crucified One, is today the formative Ideal which shines to us from the Gospel pages. And if this cannot shine through, then the gospels are dead,

This new model of Christ is of a piece with a Nietzschean ethic of power and a Darwinian philosophy of the survival of the fittest. The keynote of Hitler's philosophy is: power to the strong, subjection or annihilation to the weak. He contrasts "the so-called humanitarianism, which is merely a compound of stupidity, cowardice, and arrogance" with what he calls "the humanitarianism of Nature, which destroys the weak and thus makes room for the strong." Hence his contempt for the masses. They are those who have been left behind in this competitive struggle. And that is all the evidence we need of their inferiority. "Experience shows," he writes, "that under all forms and all conditions the majority represents the duffers and poltroons." The mistake of democracy is to entrust the destiny of a nation to this "empty-headed herd of sheep," this "voter-cattle."

If Hitler were speaking to the people of Western democracies, this is what he would tell us. And here I only paraphrase arguments I have often heard from intelligent young Nazis: "You need not feel so shocked by my feelings about democracy, nor weep crocodilean tears over the funeral of the Weimar Republic. Do you really believe in democracy? Then why don't you practise it? Is your business run on democratic lines? What control has a factory worker over the man who runs the business, pockets the profits, and has



the undisputed right to throw the worker on public relief whenever his further employment would not increase profits? You say that all men have equal right to the pursuit of happiness? Then why the inequalities between the millionaire and the man on relief, and their children, inequalities in all the opportunities that are essential to human life? You say you believe in freedom. Then how does it happen that at least fifty million dollars were spent by large business concerns on labor espionage in a single country in a single year?<sup>3</sup> You believe in the philosophy of power just as much as I do. But it suits you to keep up the pretence of democracy, while I feel that we are better off without that false front. At least I am not a hypocrite. I have the courage to proclaim the faith by which I live. And I am the stronger for it."

Rosenberg would continue where Hitler left off. "What I have done in dressing up Jesus in the brown uniform of the Hero is nothing new to you. In spite of all your crucifixes, is not the Christ you really revere the King, the Judge, the Victor, the Wonder-worker, the Man of Supernatural Power? Is there a single work of memorable art in the whole history of the West that has pictured Jesus as a worker?" We might take comfort in the thought that Rosenberg's familiarity with the christologies of the West is far from exhaustive. I wonder if his reading might include *The Man Nobody Knows*, that widely read book of the golden twenties, written by a budding business-man, who has since flowered into success? The unknown Jesus Mr. Bruce Barton discovered for the era of commercial prosperity was the leader of men, the Executive, the Advertising Man, the Magnetic Personality, the man who, living in civilized America, would have risen speedily to the presidency of the United States Steel Corporation, or higher, if there is anything higher. He is the man, Mr. Barton writes, who "proved his right to . . . sit at the head of every directors' table." "So we both think of Jesus

<sup>3</sup> See C. Calkins, *Spy Overhead*, New York, Harcourt, Brace, 1937.

as the man of power," Rosenberg would say. "The only difference between us is that Mr. Barton's ideal of power is different from mine. I think of him as the Fuehrer. He thinks of him as the Captain of Industry. To be sure, Mr. Barton prefers to conserve the idea of service. But he interprets it in terms that are perfectly consistent with his ideal of power. He thinks that the largest fortunes are accumulated by those who have given greatest service. I would not quarrel with that. Surely the Fuehrer too is the man who has served our party and our people best; and that is why he now deserves absolute and undisputed power. But on the whole, I should prefer to leave the idea of service in the subordinate position where it belongs, and repudiate altogether the Jewish idea of sacrificial service."

## 2. *Jewish Internationalism*

The Nazis reject the open community of Christianity. The basis of their community is not human, but racial; that is, a rigidly, brutally exclusive one. Just as with individuals, so also with races, Hitler declares, there are superiors and inferiors; and anyone who accepts the "viewpoint of Nature" must wish "to see the stronger side win and the weaker wiped out or subjected unconditionally to the will of the stronger." We know more than enough about the limits to which the Nazis will push this doctrine of racial exclusiveness. Recent history is too fresh in our minds.

But what shall we make of their favorite phrase, "Jewish internationalism"? Do we not think of the Jews from the very beginning of their history as anything but universalists? Did they not think of themselves as the chosen people? Did they not look on their religion and their morality as a national matter? True. But they thought of their national community as a religious and moral matter. It was religion that formed the basis of their nation, not vice versa. They did believe that their race had a religious destiny. But they never said: The religious thing about us is our blood. Never



would they have said with Rosenberg, "The noblest in man is in the blood. . . ." On the contrary, the religious conception of their racial destiny gave them a standard that transcends the community of blood in a community of humanity.

When the prophet Nathan came to vindicate the murder of Uriah against David, his indictment began with the words, "There were two men in one city, one rich, the other poor. . . ." That is the premise on which the argument proceeds: Two men. David was king, head of the Jewish community. Uriah was not even a Jew. He was a Hittite. The prophet strips off their social rank, their racial origin, and leaves nothing but their bare humanity: two men. Nathan was no internationalist in our sense of the word, nor were any of the prophets, nor was Jesus. Yet they discovered the essential basis of the international community: that the law of justice and love transcends birth, social position, culture, and everything else. Who is my neighbor? The man who fell among the thieves, man in his essential and common humanity. That is the one thing the Nazis cannot admit. Krieck, a prominent fascist writer, declares:

The humanity of no man can be separated from his situation, from the place and circumstances of his birth and his evolution. It is not true that a prince of the Blood Royal and a worker's son are endowed with the same humanity.<sup>4</sup>

In the whole of our experience there is nothing that is so absolutely a matter of fate as that of race. Whether I was born in an igloo of Eskimo parents, or in a Bowery tenement of Polish Jewish immigrants, or in a ducal mansion of parents who trace their family to the War of the Roses—there is an absolutely given fact; a fact that I could not make, or unmake, or remake. It is not, strictly speaking, a human fact at all. It is a biological fact. It is a fact about man

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted by Kolnai in *War Against the West*, p. 98. London, 1928.

only in so far as man is an animal. That is why it cannot possibly serve as the basis of a truly human community. It must serve as the basis of animal society; and of a human society only in so far as men choose to fall back on a sub-human level for the most important decision that man can ever make. When Jesus asks, "Who is my mother, my brethren, and my sisters?" and answers, "They that do the will of God," he lifts brotherhood from the level of fate to that of destiny; from the level of biology to that of humanity; from exclusive particularity to inclusive universality. The most formidable enemy of the racial community is the faith of the Jew, Jesus.

But here again Hitler can tell us: "We have no quarrel with you in this matter, if I may judge your faith from your conduct. You don't believe in the open community any more than I do." An American sympathizer of the Nazis was recently told by an official of the German embassy at Washington: "There is more anti-Jewish feeling in the United States today than there was in Germany when Hitler came into power." That is what an intelligent Nazi usually asks American critics: "Do you like the Jews? Do you accept them as your equals? The only difference between us is that you prefer subtle, indirect, tacit, and half-hearted ways of discrimination, while we choose to be more open and more thoroughgoing." Less politely: You are hypocrites, and we are not. You condemn us for anti-Semitism. Charity of that sort should start at home.

And, of course, anti-Semitism is only part of the problem for North American Christians. There is the segregation of the Negro in the South, the disfranchisement of the Oriental in the West Coast. The most striking thing of all is that wherever racial inequality exists it is reflected just as much in our churches as in our economic, political, or cultural associations: the church is as exclusive of the black man or the yellow man, as the golf club. Blacks and whites can belong together and work together in the Communist Party.



But they cannot worship together in the Church of Jesus Christ. The difference between Hitler and ourselves is that he knows that the Jewish Christ is the enemy of the exclusive community; whereas we prefer to turn him into its patron. I think Hitler understands Christ better than we do.

### 3. *Jewish Materialism*

The last grievance of the Nazis against Christianity is its "materialism." This charge seems so inept that one is tempted to dismiss it as sheer distortion of the truth for propaganda. It seems grotesque to find a recent attack on Christianity entitled "Das Materialismus des Christenthums" (written by a gentleman with the very Nordic name of Imgard Will). Yet when one examines the substance of their contention, one is amazed by the uncanny insight that it shows into a neglected aspect of Christianity.

"The Jewish aim," says Rosenberg, "is the creation of a 'Paradise' on earth. . . . In the whole of the so-called Old Testament there is no reference to the belief in immortality apart from what can be shown to be the influence of the Persians upon the Jews in exile."

In his anxiety to claim immortality as an Aryan idea Rosenberg forgets how the soul's survival after death dominated the thought of the non-Aryan inhabitants of the Eastern Mediterranean from pre-historic times. One need only think of the pyramids of Egypt and the tombs of Mycenae; and, in the Old Testament, of primitive beliefs such as those reflected in the story of the witch of Endor, who brings up Samuel's ghost from the dead for purposes of divination. But Rosenberg is right to this extent: in the religion of the *prophets* the idea of immortality is almost entirely absent; and in so far as it is present, it has no religious significance. Isaiah contemplates the prospect of death with disconsolate bitterness:

For the grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee:

They that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth.  
The living, the living, he shall praise thee.<sup>5</sup>

The "materialism" of prophetic religion is its intense and exclusive concern with human life and human relations in this world. There is an earthiness about the teaching of the prophets, a refusal to make a break between the material and the spiritual, between the economic and the religious life, between political judgments and moral judgments. That is why they are so disturbed by poverty, dispossession, economic injustice. When they picture the doom of their people, the divine judgment is expressed in material terms: "And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees" (Hosea 2: 12). And when they picture God's blessings on their people, if they be faithful to the covenant, they think of a time when every man will sit under his own vine and his own fig tree. That is the trouble with the Jews: they are not spiritual enough in their conception of the destiny of man. They want a Kingdom on earth: they want peace, they want the desert to blossom as the rose; they want safe highways and no more ravenous beasts. And Jesus, too, thinks of the Kingdom as the time when the hungry will be filled, when those who weep now will laugh, and the meek will inherit *the earth*.

And the Nazis will have none of it. To base their ideal community on the Jewish hope of giving every man his own vine and his own fig tree would embarrass a society that leaves undisturbed the immense inequalities of the acquisitive society. The Nazis know well enough that their industrial society is divided as sharply on economic lines as any other Western society. And they have not the slightest intention of overhauling the property system. National So-

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<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 38: 18. For the findings of modern scholars about the development of the idea of immortality in the Old Testament, see S. A. Cook, *The Old Testament*, pp. 135ff., Cambridge, 1936.



cialism is as little socialist as the Holy Alliance was holy. It wants to have the soul of socialism without its body: socialism without the social ownership of wealth. Hitler is explicit on this point:

It is absurd that workers should interfere with the management of economic affairs. . . . The entrepreneur carries responsibility and provides the workers with bread. They have no claim to a share in property. . . . Labor co-ownership, and, therefore, co-determination—this is simply Marxism, whereas I reserve the right to such an influence exclusively to the State administered by a higher set.<sup>6</sup>

What then? Economic community is "materialist." We must find community on a purer, spiritual plane. So we have the paradox of a racial community, with its zoological unity of blood, making the most exalted claims of a mystical union of soul. The differences of peasant and Junker, of factory worker and millionaire industrialist, of undernourished children of the poor and the spoiled children of the fabulously rich—these differences are all transcended in the "mystical holiness of the blood-tie," which binds all Germans with one another and the Fuehrer. The Leader now bears the whole burden of the imaginary unity of this actually disunified mass. He must be idealized so as to command blind devotion. He must be represented as the incarnation of heroism, power, wisdom, and unselfishness. And so the earthly figure of the Leader disappears in a mist of saint worship. *Mein Kampf* is the life of a saint written by himself: one who has not one sin to confess, not a single mistake to acknowledge; one who has been the victim of betrayal and injustice, but has never betrayed anyone and never been unjust. Mussolini paints his self-portrait in an even less inhibited mood:

I do not drink; I do not smoke, and I am not interested in cards or games. . . . As for the love of the table, I don't

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted by Kolnai, *War Against the West*, p. 373.

appreciate it. . . . In every hour of my life it is the spiritual element which leads me on. . . . I have annihilated in myself every egoism. . . . I feel that all Italians understand and love me; I know that only he is loved who leads without weakness, without deviation, and with disinterested and full faith.<sup>7</sup>

Hearing these words at the cool distance of several thousand miles; setting them in the perspective of other saints of history, who have felt themselves to be the greatest sinners (one thinks of Isaiah, "Woe is me for I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips")—one may easily forget that these words can be taken at their face value by thousands of men and women, especially young men and women, believed in with passionate intensity, and made the basis of a community of intoxicating power. I have known a man who used to greet these words with the cynical smile of a socialist intellectual, yet was swept off his feet after a few months' stay in Nazi Germany, and returned to this country still under its hypnotic spell. One cannot mobilize millions of people through naked terror and fraudulent promises. One must tap deep-rooted impulses, stir motives, and exploit needs that are well-nigh universal.

#### 4. *Fascist Community*

We live in a world that is starved for comradeship. Its deepest psychological, or rather human, problem is the haunting sense of isolation. It meets us in a thousand forms in every aspect of our culture: in books on clinical psychology, where it appears as a key symptom in many neuroses; in the eccentricity and obscurity of much modern art, which is a confession of desperate isolation, forced to retreat from coherent communication to disjointed reverie; or in our everyday life, with its intense self-consciousness, its trivialized relations, its cheap gregariousness, its incommunicable lone-

<sup>7</sup> *My Autobiography*, pp. 170, 171, 252. His admiring American biographer, R. W. Child, describes Mussolini's political career as "applied spirituality" (p. 8 of Child's foreword).



liness. Back from the arctic solitude of Iceland to the populous city of London, a young poet feels the very walls of his room

Humming with the fear of it,  
With the fear of loneliness,  
And uncommunicableness.  
All the wires are cut, my friends  
Live beyond the severed ends.

This is the picture of our predicament. And I need hardly add that isolation need mean neither aloneness nor unso-ciableness. One can be alone, yet not be lonely. Or one can live in hectic sociability, yet be oppressed by isolation.

The causes for this predicament are many. But the most important and pervasive one of all is the impact on person-ality of our acquisitive society: a society that encourages every man to seek his own advantage, with the pious hope that an invisible hand will somehow look after the common good; that compels us to treat nine-tenths of the men and women around us as means to our own ends; that gives us no common possessions and few common loyalties; that con-demns some to a life of endless self-aggrandizement, others to endless insecurity, and still others in between to the soul-killing fear of failing in the competitive struggle and the soul-killing strategy of using one's friends as so many steps in the ladder of social advancement.

Imagine all this aggravated by a chronic depression, wide-spread unemployment, and unprecedented poverty. And add the humiliation of a crushing military defeat: the fail-ure of the one loyalty that had seemed to transcend this sordid struggle for private gain and personal success, had seemed to offer a devotion worthy of any sacrifice, and had brought to men the unexpected comradeship of the trenches. That is the mind of post-war Germany to which Hitler ad-dressed his propaganda. I am not suggesting that he became master of Germany through the force of his propaganda alone. He had the active financial support of a few of the

great German industrialists; and the passive support of a large portion of the German ruling class, who saw in Hitler a lesser evil to communism. Nevertheless his propaganda was effective, and formed an important part of his success; for he offered comradeship to masses of isolated people.

Two quotations suggest the mood of this new community at its best. One is from Hitler's speech to sixty thousand Hitler Youth in August, 1933, at Nuremberg:

You are yet young. You have not yet learned to know the separating influences of life. You can so bind yourselves to one another that later life can never separate you. You must not let into your hearts self-conceit, presumption, class-consciousness, differences between rich and poor. You must rather preserve in your youth what you possess: the great feeling of comradeship and the sense of belonging to one another.

The other is a poem by Baldur von Schirach, head of the Hitler Youth, the man who was responsible for the dissolution of the Christian youth organizations in Germany: "To a Young Worker"—

When I hold your hardened hand  
Then I hold my Fatherland

Though everything around us break  
Let us keep firm our common stake

From this hand-shake will surely grow  
The lost faith of long ago

For you and I already feel  
From this hand-shake the common weal.

Here seems realized at last the wistful ideal of many Christians: to reach hands above the walls of wealth and social class, not in anger that would tear down these walls, but in friendship that would assure those on the other side that material barriers cannot prevent unity of the spirit. "Is not fellowship a spiritual thing? Then why confuse it with the



irrelevant issue of material sharing? Why cannot we have a communism of the spirit? Are not the things of the spirit the only things that can be truly shared: the more we give of them to others, the more we have for ourselves; we can give them, without giving them up; we can use them together, yet never use them up. Let the rich keep their wealth; let the poor be content with honest poverty; but let us realize our common possession of a treasure that is indivisible, incorruptible, and of infinite worth." The earnest minister of the gospel who spoke these words would be shocked to see them used as a parallel to Hitler and von Schirach. But in spite of his intention, the pattern of Christian community as he conceives it is identical with the Nazi pattern in this respect: they both envisage an idealist community, community on the ideal plane of imagination and feeling, not on the material plane of work and income; they will not upset economic inequalities, but strive to achieve an intense consciousness of fellowship in spite of them. So here is a "church," as Barth has called the Nazi State; but a church that has rejected the faith in the equal dignity of all men that haunts even the most other-worldly Christian sect. How can that be? How base a community not on inclusive equality but on exclusive superiority? Let us look at the Nazi gospel.

The hero of *Mein Kampf* is the German soldier. Its background is the humiliation of Versailles. Its theme is the defeat of Germany. Its message is that there is no such defeat. The German soldier was victorious in this as in every other war. Future historians will celebrate the great victory of German arms in this war as in every other. But they will also tell the story of the sneaks, liars, Jewish Marxist mutineers and financiers behind the lines, who stabbed the soldier in the back, and robbed him of the fruits of his victory. Two figures emerge as the drama proceeds: a German soldier, steel-helmeted, proud, erect, irresistible; and a slinking, cowering figure, his bestial face distorted in terror, knowing that his end has come. Two feelings take possession of you as you read: pride that you are one with the German soldier,

of the same substance with him, his strength yours, his victory yours; and a savage joy that you are not one with the other creature, a peculiar satisfaction in his terror, and triumph in his annihilation.

"The sight of suffering does one good, the infliction of suffering does one more good—this is a hard maxim, but none the less a fundamental maxim, old, powerful, and 'human, all-too-human.'"<sup>8</sup> So wrote a man who is now acclaimed as one of the prophets of National Socialism, Friedrich Nietzsche. What is it, one wonders as one reads this, that can explain so vicious, almost insane, a response as delight in others' suffering? That sadism is no invention of Nietzsche's is clear not only from the records of psychopathology but also from such historical facts as gladiatorial fights. For several centuries the most exciting diversion of civilized persons was a spectacle in which two, three, or even a score or more of men and women would be butchered in the arena. What is there in human nature that could find pleasure in that? A man slips and falls on an icy pavement. Why do you laugh, or have to restrain a laugh? What is there so irresistibly funny about a man chasing his hat (perhaps the only decent hat he has), nearly catching up with it, and then just missing it as a new gust of wind rolls it into a pool of dirty water? The answer, of course, is in the enjoyment of your own superiority. You are up, while he is down. Your hat is safe; his is in the mud. You are safe in your seat, while another's blood is staining the sand of the arena. The other's misfortune serves to bolster up your shaky self-complacency. It hides for a moment the blows that reality has struck at your illusion of omnipotence, and makes you feel, "At least my hat is on my head. At least I am not a Jew."

The sense of superiority is accepted in our business life as its dominant drive. The most enthusiastic supporter of the present economic system would not deny this. Quite the contrary. He would insist that this is "human nature"; that

<sup>8</sup> *Genealogy of Morals*, p. 74. English translation by Ludovici.



the only thing that will make men exert themselves to the utmost, and bring out every ounce of energy in constructive use, is the desire to get ahead, to get to the top, to get power, to win the game. Hitler's genius is to take this appeal to superiority and turn it from an individualist, divisive, disintegrating force into a basis of community. That is the magic of the racial philosophy. It offers a superiority open on equal terms effortlessly to all Germans. Through the very fact of birth I belong to this superior entity, I am a superior man. I can thus retain the illusion of omnipotence by enlarging its radius, making it more plausible and more attractive: It is not I alone who am omnipotent, but the great German race, and I, as one of the nation that is destined to rule the world. I can retain ego-centricity in its most naked form by transferring it from my self to the nation. I can claim the right of absolute supremacy for my nation, the duty of submission on the part of any other that stands in the way, and do it with a good conscience: "What right have the Czechs to freedom? Are they not an inferior race? There is only one highest right: the right of the superior to rule the inferior."

This pooled ego-centricity of millions becomes incarnate in the Leader. He can exhibit with impunity attitudes that would strike one in any other as sheer childishness—naïve display of the tinsel of statecraft (uniforms, medals, ribbons, banners, etc.), truculent boasting, tantrums of impatience, paroxysms of anger, shrieks of hate. These "symptoms of relapse into the raw primitive"<sup>9</sup> can appear beautiful and holy to those who are under his spell, for they express the holiness of the racial will. The relation of follower to leader is indeed a mystical one; "magical" would be an even more exact description. For magic alone can express the mood of ecstatic release from critical thinking, the acceptance of blind devotion and blind obedience to another man's will, the willingness of multitudes to abdicate common sense, in-

<sup>9</sup> Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization*, p. 362, New York, 1934.

tellest, even conscience, and say, with Dr. Ley, Minister of Labor, "I believe in Adolf Hitler alone,"<sup>10</sup> or with Dr. Frank, Minister of Justice,

Formerly we were in the habit of saying, "This is Right or Wrong." Today we must put the question accordingly, "What would the Fuehrer say?" This is the Categorical Imperative to which German life must henceforward conform.<sup>11</sup>

I heard an English social worker relate this conversation with the leader of a girl's work-camp in Germany:

Why are you here?

Because the Fuehrer wishes it.

Why does he wish it?

Because it is for the good of our country.

Why do you think it is for the good of your country?

Because the Fuehrer wishes it.

Here is magic stripped to fighting-weight: magic unencumbered by the dogmas and symbols of a discredited other-worldliness, making its appeal directly to the craving for superiority. Its "charm" is its power to exploit the lingering immaturity of civilized man: his illusion of power, his self-centered outlook, his willingness to shift responsibility from his own fallible judgment to the inspired intuitions of the Leader. The real modern alternative to unreal Christianity is a community of modernized magic.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted by Duncan-Jones in his *Struggle for Religious Freedom in Germany*, p. 263, London, 1939.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted by Kolnai, p. 29.



## CHAPTER V

### REALIZING OUR FAITH

#### *1. Human Impossibilities*

DESPERATE men of action have had the courage, or the folly, to repudiate openly our Christian ideals as sentimental illusions. They have deified power, and scorned the rights of the weak. They have expunged from their faith universal brotherhood and perpetual peace. Their method strikes us with horror as a great betrayal. Yet there is power in it. It can be made to appeal to thousands, to hundreds of thousands, in this country, as in every other. The Coughlins, the Moseleys, the Arcands, and their ilk will know how to exploit its power to the full as they flatter racial pride and embitter racial contempt. And the most frightening thought of all is that the fascist faith in the will to power is closer to the daily practice of the so-called Christian nations than their professed faith in equality, fraternity, and liberty.

We know that we can never go that way without surrendering the deepest insights of our Christian faith. As Christians we must fight this false religion, which glorifies ego-centricity, feeds on hate, and reverts to magic. As Christians we are committed to a diametrically opposite way. We must find sincerity by realizing these ideals of human dignity and human brotherhood; by denying everything in our common life that goes against them. Yet when we look at that task, when we see how wide-spread in our world is the craving for superiority, how rare the conviction of equality, our heart sinks at the prospect. It looks like an impossible task.

In that hopeless mood there is hope. For it means at least that we are face to face with reality, under no illusions about the vastness of the task and the smallness of our own strength. We do not want to attempt the impossible. Rightly so. The

impossible is, by definition, that which cannot be done. To attempt the impossible is not the command of religion, but the counsel of magic. It is another expression of the illusion of omnipotence. Inspirational speakers who urge us to do the impossible are encouraging us to revert to the childish attitude to life. The beginning of wisdom here is to recognize this fact and clear our minds of this illusion as it invades our very effort to escape it.

I cannot ask the impossible of myself. I cannot take it upon myself to redeem the world, and reform the world, and remake the world. If I try to lift that impossible load on my own back, I shall not budge the load, and shall surely break my back.

The world has its fair share of self-appointed messiahs. They have set out years ago propelled by some explosive enthusiasm. They have not spared themselves, nor anyone else. They have slaved away, fought for lost causes, tried to convert impossible people, to balance unbalanceable budgets, and to move immovable institutions. And now they are tired. Their energy is spent. Their confidence is gone. They are ready to throw up the sponge. And because they are so weary and so discouraged, they are impatient with others, intolerant, distrustful. They cannot forgive, cannot persuade. They put others immediately on the defensive and easily alienate them. And doing all this not for themselves but for their cause, when they discredit themselves, they discredit their cause. Others look at them and say: If this is the authorized and exclusive agent for the new heavens and the new earth, I shall have to put up with the old.

This is the predicament of the religious individualist. If one were concerned only to cultivate the varieties of religious experience in the poor-soil garden of one's own consciousness, then the paradox would not be so great. But if one conceives oneself as the herald of a Kingdom, if one is working for a Great Society, and undertakes to do all this as an individualist, then the paradox is fantastic, and it involves tragic ineffectiveness.



Not that other forms of religious individualism achieve their intended end. Along with our tired radicals there are those who have never been tired in this struggle because they have never entered it at all. In contrast to the haggard fighter in many a lone and bloody battle, we see these others round us the picture of deliberate cheerfulness and self-conscious radiance; their souls well oiled by the techniques of modern psychology, massaged with Yogi, sun-bathed with theosophy. Seeking so anxiously to nurse their own spiritual health away from a diseased society, they too attempt the impossible. They are trying to find the God who moves the world and rules the world by retreating from God's world. They are trying to save their soul, and can only lose it.

There is still another group of individualists, who scorn the safe ecstasies of mountain-top experiences, away from air-raids and starving children, yet also feel the futility of trying to stay the enemy with their own puny strength. So they steel themselves to face the worst whatever it be, suffering, defeat, death, without compromising their ideal. They reclaim the impregnable fortress of Epictetus: the world may take my property, ruin my work, defame my name, destroy my friends, enslave my nation, torture and kill my body; but it cannot invade the citadel of my will; it cannot make me lie, or fear, or hate; it cannot make me disloyal to my faith. They too are after the impossible. The object of the command to love is to rescue the man who fell among the thieves. I do not fulfil the command by presenting the thieves with one more victim whose hands are free from violence and heart immaculately pure from ill will.

It is clear that my own good intentions can never be good enough, my own heroic exertions never strong enough, to realize my faith. For my faith concerns not only myself, nor chiefly myself, but the world of which I am a part. The realization of my faith requires a new society. And I cannot take it upon myself to bring in this new society. I cannot do it alone.

Nor can anyone else. The cry for the Great Personality,

the Mystic Genius, the Heaven-sent Messiah who will do for us what we cannot do for ourselves individually or collectively is a cry for magic. It is a device to shift responsibility: to excuse aimless feet and listless mind while waiting for the Leader; to justify sheeplike obedience to his will when he has come. A leader can serve us only so long as we do not ask the impossible of him. What is possible for a leader is that he should be a guide, a skilled worker. If the rest of us will do our work, if all will take responsibility for common decisions, the leader can serve us well. But if we ask him to make up our minds for us, to think for us instead of thinking with us, to relieve us of democratic self-control, we lose a leader and get a dictator. A leader is an instrument of common responsibility. A dictator is a creature of common irresponsibility. Hence the absurdity of the expectation that salvation can come through "God-controlled dictators." That phrase is a contradiction in terms. If a man is God-controlled, then he cannot be a dictator, but the servant of God, and the servant of men in a co-operative, self-governing community. Give any man the right to dictate God's guidance to others, and you open the door to the most demonic tyranny, tyranny with divine right. "In resisting the Jews I am fighting to accomplish the work of the Lord," says Hitler.

## 2. *Divine Necessity*

So far we are led to a purely negative conclusion. I cannot realize my faith alone. Nor can anyone else realize it for me. What then? Is it a hopeless task? No. Nothing is hopeless except a society in which that task would be left undone. But who can do it, if neither ordinary nor extraordinary men can? "With men it is impossible, but not with God." God can do it.

I can see more than one reader look up at this juncture and smile or scowl. "There, at last," I hear him say. "I have caught you at your own game. You have been accusing others of magic. Now you fall back on it yourself at the critical point."



I do not resent this interruption. "God" has been used so often for the purpose of magic, that it is hard to think of him otherwise than as *deus ex machina*. We have come to expect him at the end of a theological argument and of a religious analysis: when the logic is strained, when realism grows foggy, when the strategy is lame and sentimental, an idol named God will be sure to pop in to everyone's relief, make the customary jerks, and put everything right. The reader has good reasons to suspect this intrusion. This is the usual place for it. So let us be on guard. It may help if we avoid the conventional jargon as much as we can.

What power has an ideal to realize itself? We have heard often enough that "truth crushed to ground will rise again"; and we might express the same pious sentiment about brotherhood, justice, etc. But why should they rise? What would make them rise? What force will lift them up against overwhelming material pressures? Is it the touching faith of the idealists who "support" them, and are ready to give their lives for them? Is that all? Is the power of the ideal the strength of the idealists' desire to see it realized? What chance has that heroic but scanty and rather scatter-brained company against the indifference of the multitudes and the deadly efficiency of the realists in the other camp? If we have no better grounds for the realization of our faith than the beauty, nobility, and perfection of our ideals, then we might as well say at once: "Abandon hope all ye who enter here." The futility of idealism is the futility of wish-thinking, no matter how sublime.

Our only hope lies elsewhere. Instead of beginning with beautiful dreams, and then casting about to see how we can coax the world to make them true, let us begin the other way round: Let us look at reality itself and discern its own structure, its own historic direction, its possibilities, its opportunities, its commands. If we read that direction aright and work with it, our work is sound, our cause is invincible. If we try to go against it, we are heading for frustration, no matter how sublime our ideals and how selfless our devotion.

That is why I say: Only God can realize our faith. And when I speak of God I am thinking of a power at work in the world, inescapably present through all reality, through all its contradictory aspects: in its gentlest and toughest side; in its happiest and most tragic moments; in its spiritual and its physical dimension. Let me speak here of the neglected part of God, the unknown part of him for most Christians, yet the most important part for anyone who would exchange dreamy religion for active religion.

If God pervades all reality, he must pervade material reality. If God is not in the material world, he is unreal or half-real. Traditional theology is confused and confusing on this point. On the one hand, it assures us that God made the heavens and the earth. On the other hand, it defines God as a purely spiritual being, and thus politely banishes him from the world that he has made. Thus many Christians are atheists in their conception of the material world and in their dealings with it.

Consider that all-important basis of our common life to-day: the Machine. Our own period of world-history began with the Industrial Revolution; any social revolutions, past or pending, would be unthinkable in this period without that mechanical revolution which increased man's power over nature a hundredfold or more.<sup>1</sup> What is the religious meaning of the machine? Many Christians distrust it on principle. They look upon it as inhuman, unnatural, not to say diabolical, and godless. It figures in many sermons as a Frankenstein's monster that enslaves man. This is not only atheism, but nonsense as well. Only man can enslave man. Man can be enslaved *through* the machine (as he can also be liberated through the machine); never *by* the machine.

But there is nothing inhuman or unhuman about the machine. Only man can make it. A machine is as distinctively

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<sup>1</sup> In *Technics and Civilization* Lewis Mumford ventures the estimate that at the present time a machine worker can produce on the average 240 times as much as a hand worker.



and brilliantly and expressively human as a violin sonata or a theorem in Euclid. It is not just a bit of matter. It is matter transformed in the likeness of a human thought. Indeed it is a human thought, projected from men's brain in the external world, given body, so it can carry on an independent existence. And it is not only man who expresses himself through the machine. It is God. For with the one exception of speech, the machine is the greatest instrument of human interdependence yet discovered. If God be "the power that makes us one," the order of reality that forces us out of exclusive isolation into creative unity with one another, then the machine is surely a divine agency.

One cannot overestimate the importance of this point. For it means that the command to love is written in the material structure of our everyday life. Mutuality is not just a shiny ideal that catches the eye of a few idealists. It is the demand of the historic process. It is not merely a moral obligation, which can be set aside because of more urgent practical necessities. It is the most urgently practical need of our life. It is a moral obligation precisely because it is also a material necessity. For it is obvious that the machine is not a tool for individual production but for co-operative production; that it is essentially a public utility. It is created by co-operative scientific thinking. It can function only by linking together immense numbers of men as workers, managers, consumers. Take this public utility and make it the property of one man, or a few men, who will use it for their private profit, and what happens? You are trying, once again, to do the impossible. You try to turn an agency of co-operation into an agency of individual profit. You will not work it according to its own nature. So it will not work at all. And so you get closed factories, unemployed millions, and people suffering and dying for lack of those very things that men and factories could produce for the use of all, but cannot produce for the profit of a few. And common folk look at it all, and shake their heads, and say, "It is madness." That is just what it is. But the madness is not in the ma-

chine. The machine is one of the most compellingly rational of human discoveries. The madness is in those who would use a rational thing to further the irrational ends of exploitation and domination. It is the madness of trying to use an instrument of God for the purposes of the devil.

And what will God do? What can he do? He cannot change his nature to make up for our stupidity, and make unworkable things workable for our sake. The prophets discovered this long ago. They found that, if men will not know willingly the God of love, they will know unwillingly the God of wrath. There are not two gods. The God of wrath is the God of love vindicating himself in the death of those who will not live in love. It is the laws of health that destroy those who disobey them. There are no laws of disease other than the laws of health. It is the laws of logic that condemn those who ignore them to nonsense and self-contradiction. The identical forms that show up the crookedness of illogical thinking prove the straightness of logical thinking. It is God, not the devil, who rules the world through the terror and desolation of unemployment and concentration camps and pogroms and air-raids, in Germany, in Spain, in China, in Poland. The initiative lies with God, and the judgment lies with God. The power of love perennially present in the structure of human life, now more urgent than ever in the co-operative nature of the machine, is the power of God. It is pressing down upon human divisiveness and pride, crushing us in so far as we will not obey, destroying the old order that will not yield to the new.

That is why there is hope, grim hope. There is no assurance that the community of love and justice will triumph today, or tomorrow, or twenty years hence. But there is the certainty that no other community can triumph, for none other fits the structure of reality. Men will no doubt try desperate choices again and again. And each of them will have its day, flaunt its pride, then go down to blind destruction.

It is like a man who thinks he can build on sand. Reality



does not shake a warning finger in his face, nor does it take him by the scruff of the neck and make him quit. It lets him build. Up go the walls, and after a while the house stands complete. The practical man, the man of action, now sneers at the quaint ideal of building on rock. All seems well for days, for months, till the rains descend, and the floods rise, and the winds blow and beat upon that house, and down it falls, and great is the fall thereof. What then? The crash of the old house is an opportunity to build a new one on surer foundations. But it is no more than an opportunity. It is not a compulsion. There is nothing to keep our friend from giving sand a second chance, or a third. Every time he does this there will be another crash, and another chance to change his mind.

Is there anything to keep him from doing this over and over again endlessly? Yes. His own nature. He is a man, with a capacity to be rational, that is, to recognize reality, and learn from it infinitely more than any other animal could ever learn. If he has this capacity, why does he not use it more often? What keeps him from using it? It is pride, ego-centricity, the illusion of omnipotence: the sense that his own ideas and ideals and wishes are good enough, and he will not be bothered about the laws and demands of reality. That too is part of his nature, his childish nature. A very regrettable part. But there it is. You cannot wish it out of existence. It is part of reality. Let reality deal with it. So it does. It smashes it down. When you shiver before the ruins of your old house, you are on a different frame of mind, from the cocksure mood in which you built. It is harder to ignore reality after the crash than before. Some people can keep ignoring it even then; it is possible to keep your faith in Christian Science in the midst of a typhoid epidemic. But you have to be an exceptional man to rise to such heights of isolation from reality. If that were not an exception, but the rule, the human race would have perished long ago, and been replaced by less imaginative but more sensible animals.

### *3. The Rôle of the Workers and the Task of the Middle Class*

Let us change the parable a bit. Two families want to build a house together. Family A will have the basement and the ground floor. Family B will have second floor and attic. Against expert advice they build on a lot near the river, within easy reach of a flood, if it should come. After a year or two, sure enough, there is a flood. Family A wakes up one morning to find the basement flooded and pools of water in the living-room and kitchen. Family B on the second floor are very sympathetic. But their quarters are dry. This happens every other year for the next ten. Now which of the two is more likely to curse the decision to build so near the river? Which of the two is more eager to change to a dryer spot, even at considerable sacrifice?

Most of the readers of this book belong to family B. We know about unemployment, about the depression, about living on relief standards. A few of us may know enough about these things to advise those who suffer from them. But we do not have that direct and immediate knowledge that comes through hunger and not through books, through the wizened bodies of one's own underfed children, through unprevented preventable illness and death. That knowledge is the exclusive possession of those who feel on their own bodies the lashes of the wrath of God because the whole of our society has ignored the love of God. They are cursed for our corporate sin. And therefore they are blessed with a unique historic mission. Theirs will be the strategic place in the movement to destroy human exploitation and establish human dignity. They have that destiny not because they are saints, but because they are victims. Whatever be their ideals, or lack of them, whatever their professed belief or unbelief, they are on the ground floor of reality, defenseless against it, and, on the whole, freest from the illusion and self-deceit of those who dwell in higher and drier quarters. The drive of the struggle for justice will have to come



mainly from them, who suffer most from the prevailing injustice. It is their struggle, more than it is ours. If they do not fight for it, it will never go beyond paper-schemes and charity-grants. They are the instruments of God, though they may not know God.

They may seem to be weak instruments. Economic dispossession has meant for them also intellectual and cultural disinheritance. They have been given stones instead of bread: literacy in place of education; jazz and Hollywood, stories and pictures in dime and nickel publications, bathing beauties and rainbows on laundry calendars instead of music, literature, and art. So they lack the intellectual acumen and emotional refinement of those who hold economic power and command its benefits. But they have two things, through which they will be invincible once they discover their strength: They are indispensable, for they are the workers. No privileged class can exist without them, the underprivileged. They are the base of the social pyramid, without which the top or even the middle would be ridiculously superfluous. And there are many of them. They are a majority.<sup>2</sup> Under a democratic government that gives them a decisive advantage. They can ask for what they need, and they will get it. And it is impossible to doubt that sooner or later they will ask for what they need most of all: common ownership of the machine, so that it can be put to steady work for the common needs, not left to work or idle for private profit. You can fool all the people through one war and one depression. You can fool some of the people (the ones on the higher floors) through any number of wars and depressions. But you cannot fool the people on the ground floor through war after war and depression after depression.

Why have they not asked for this already? Why do not

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<sup>2</sup> One suggestive figure: Near the height of prosperity, in 1930, 56.2% of all wage and salary earners in Canada received on the average less than \$520 a year. This estimate is based on the Dominion Census. See F. R. Scott, *Canada To-day*, p. 54, Toronto, 1938.

they ask for it now? Because they are confused and divided. The strategy of every ruling class has been twofold: Confuse to conquer. Divide to conquer. Confuse them about economic issues and political issues. Smoke screens of propaganda: that labor unions are rackets and union leaders are reds; that President Roosevelt uses fascist methods and is a communist (or, at least, a communist sympathizer); that bad business is due to interference from the White House and high taxes. Smoke screens of hate: that the enemy is the Negro, or the Catholic, or the communist, or the Jew. Divide them against one another and keep them fighting among themselves: farmer against labor, skilled worker against unskilled worker, employed against unemployed, the A. F. of L. against the C. I. O., the Catholic against the Protestant, and both against the Jew.

Hence our own urgently needed contribution to the struggle. First of all, let us rid ourselves from middle-class contempt for the "great unwashed" ("yokels who sleep in their underclothes," in the words of the spiritual father of American fascism, H. L. Mencken) or else from messianic yearnings to be the saviors and the leaders of the workers. If we try to lead them, we shall mislead them. Only workers, and those who share fully the conditions of their life, can lead the workers. And no one can save them except God working in history. The initiative comes from God, and the power comes from God. Our task is to clear away the obstacles so that the creative forces can break through. It is to counteract some of the sources of the division and confusion that keep us all from the community of mutuality, which is God's purpose for us in our time. Our task is to work for understanding and for unity.

Some of us are educators. Our task is to educate, not to indoctrinate. It is to bring men and women, especially young men and women, face to face with the essential facts about our economic system and about the political scene at home and abroad, about race and religion. And all of us are citizens, and must take our place in groups whose pur-



pose is to defend democracy and extend it, whose power is not the power of money or of hate but the united strength of men of good will. Any organization to promote understanding between Jews, Catholics, and Protestants; to work for peace and order among nations, restraint of aggression, and immediate aid to the victims of aggression; to fight for civil liberties at home, for freedom of speech in school and church and factory; to protect the employed workers' right to organize, and the unemployed workers' right to the decent necessities of living in the absence of the primary right to work; to bring together youth to face their common problems and decide for themselves their common policy of constructive action—any such organization deserves our support. Perhaps "support" is the wrong word. It suggests perfunctory attendance at a public meeting and the patronizing dollar on the subscription list. In every one of these groups there is an urgent need for time and energy on the part of persons such as the readers of this book. It is for us to give ourselves freely wherever we can be of most use. The seriousness with which we give ourselves is the measure of our sincerity in realizing our faith.

Does it seem pedestrian and unheroic to spend our time organizing study groups among harmless middle-class people, running to meetings of a civil liberties union or working with a youth council? If so, we must ask ourselves once again: What are we after? To indulge a hankering for heroism? Or to understand the nature of reality and accept its command? If the latter, then there is only one way to estimate the importance of our job: not by its appeal to our romantic fancies, but the demand of a historical crisis.

The meaning of that crisis has been explained often in recent years:<sup>3</sup> Democracy is in danger. We are in peril of losing not the economic democracy we never had, but the

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<sup>3</sup> I am thinking of such books as Harold J. Laski's *Liberty in the Modern State*, London, 1934 (also issued later as a Pelican Book); Max Lerner's *It Is Later Than You Think*, New York, 1938; George Counts' *Prospects of American Democracy*, New York, 1938.

political democracy we do have. The peril grows out of the contradiction between an autocratic economic system, which concentrates ownership and control in a handful of industrialists and financiers,<sup>4</sup> and a democratic political system, which recognizes all men's equal right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The danger to democracy comes not from the left but from the right. The workers and the farmers, as well as the middle classes, have everything to gain and nothing to lose from the preservation of popular sovereignty. The wealthy minority has much to lose: its immense economic power, its vast emoluments, its unequal privileges. What it fears is the awakening of the masses to a realization of their democratic power to demand economic change. What it sees is their inevitable awakening in the face of depression and war. What it threatens is to destroy democracy rather than yield its own autocratic power. This happened in Italy, in Germany, in Spain. It is not impossible in lands with a longer democratic tradition. Major General George Van Horn Moseley, recently retired from the United States Army, has made such statements as these:

We could all rest in complete security at home under the protection of the army, if we knew that in an emergency it would receive proper orders from the White House. We do know, however, that if the administration went too far to the Left and asked our military establishment to

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<sup>4</sup> See A. A. Berle and G. C. Means, *The Modern Corporation and Private Property*, New York, 1933. "From 1924 to 1929 there is a very marked increase in the proportion of all corporate income going to the two hundred largest corporations, increasing from 33.4% in 1920 to 43.2% in 1929. . . . If the more rapid rates of growth from 1924 to 1929 were maintained for the next twenty years, 85% of corporate wealth would be held by 200 huge units. . . . Approximately 2,000 men were directors of the 200 largest corporations in 1930. Since an important number of these are inactive, the ultimate control of nearly half of industry was actually in the hands of a few hundred men." Pp. 38-46.

By 1934 these two hundred companies controlled 55% of the total corporate wealth of the United States. See the paper by Prof. Paul Douglass in *Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work*, 1934, p. 232.



execute orders which violated all American tradition, that army would demur. It is your salvation today. . . .

The Fascists and Nazis in America have only one mission, as I understand them, and that is to see to it that the Communists shall not take possession of this nation. In fact, the finest type of Americanism can breed under their protection, as they neutralize the efforts of the Communists.<sup>5</sup>

In such a crisis our duty is crystal-clear. It is to defend democracy; to preserve it in the political field in order to extend it to the economic field; to strengthen it against its enemies from without and from within. And the strength of democracy is solely in the vigilance of those of its citizens who believe in it, are ready to work for it, and, if need be, fight for it. It is no stronger than the disciplined groups that are aware of its peril and are ready to stand by it in time of need. Our place is with those groups: to encourage those in which we cannot participate, such as the labor unions; to enlist in, support, and, if called to it, lead middle-class groups, or, better still, groups that cut across class divisions in their loyalty to the greater democracy that is to be.

#### 4. *The Christian in the Struggle*

Many who are convinced of the necessity of this struggle, and have never a doubt about the side they wish to support, are still full of doubts about their ability to participate in it as religious persons. They ask: How identify a secular struggle with a religious imperative? How espouse its immediate goals and consent to its methods without compromising the absolute perfection of one's Christian ideals?

Let us take first the problem of compromise. It is inevitable that a mass organization, even with the best of intentions, will at times blunt meanings and blur distinctions that seem to its most enlightened supporters to be essential in-

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted in the *New Republic*, June 7th, 1939, p. 120. One would do well to read the whole article on Moseley in that issue.

redients of truth; that some of its leaders will succumb to regrettable attitudes and some of its actions veer toward questionable tactics. And then the question, often agonizingly poignant for the man of religious sensitiveness: Can I condone this? Do the high objectives of this group justify my tolerance of its means?

In spite of all the dust kicked up in current discussions of ends and means, the answer is relatively simple: The right path to my objective is the most direct. On a plain it will be straight as an arrow. Over mountainous terrain it may have to twist like a switchback. The determining factor is not my aesthetic preference for straight lines and dislike for twists and loops. It is the lay of the land. So it is with all social action. The determining factor is the historical situation within which I find myself. History presents me with a limited number of real choices. I must choose among these. The best is the one that is most effective. But what if this best is not good enough? What if it is still a long way from absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness, absolute love? That makes no difference. If there is a better possibility, then point it out, and I shall gladly take it. But if there is none better, then this, bad as it is, is the best real possibility, and this is the only right thing to do. Does this mean that the end justifies the means? It means that reality justifies the means and the end and everything else. It means that I have renounced idealist longings and purist day-dreams and magic, and am working within the limited possibilities of the only world within which action is possible—the real world.

But how would this differ from cynical realism? Is it not faithlessness, or at best disillusionment, rather than faith? How can it express a religious attitude toward life?

The difference between religious realism and any other kind is simply this: that the religious person can afford a more radical, more thoroughgoing realism than can others. So long as one fears reality, so long as one retains any reservation in one's surrender to it, the least qualification in one's



trust, one is not free to achieve the most complete view of it. The cynical realist is well equipped to see the worst. And because reality is shot through with evil, he has an immense advantage over his squeamish neighbors. Others can never take a good look at evil because they are afraid of it. The cynical realist is not afraid of shock, for nothing can shock him. Yet his very cynicism is another set of blinkers. There is a lingering bitterness, an old grudge that clips his imagination and keeps him from seeing the very things that would rebuke his cynicism. His faith cannot be shaken, for he has none; but his faithlessness may be. What the cynical realist cannot see is the reality of the God of love; the historic initiative of the creative forces in the world, against which the forces of evil are a destructive, self-destructive, unstable episode.

Too long have Christians distinguished themselves by misty idealism. Faith is no substitute for clear vision. Faith is the vision of reality. It is not make-believe, nor wish to believe, nor will to believe. It is the impact of reality upon one's whole being, and the wholeness of one's response. It is the affirmation of reality and willing self-subordination to it. My ideas, my ideals, my wishes, my aspirations are of no account. Reality alone is of any account. I must seek to understand it, approach it humbly, reverently, inquiringly, always ready to be transformed and renewed by it. The heart of religion is Jesus' prayer: Thy will be done; not my will, but thine be done. If that prayer be sincere, it issues in a quality of life which is the unique contribution of the religious person in the struggle for justice.

Anyone with even slight acquaintance with movements for social justice knows how often they are deflected from their aim, confused and corrupted through the egotism of their most promising leaders and the sectarianism of their most devoted followers. One need only think of the Ramsay MacDonalds of the British labor movement; of former socialists who are now fascists or reactionaries; and of scores like them throughout the world, many of whom have never consciously

betrayed their ideal, but have been betrayed by their unconscious love of power. And think also of well-meaning, but ineffective people, powerless to advance their purpose because they have sanctified a formula or canonized a leader or arrested a movement into a clique.

I know of no protection from such inevitable corruption except religious faith. Faith means detachment from any segment of reality through attachment to the living whole. Victory over ego-centricity comes through active realization that my own life, meaningless in itself, gains meaning through its relation to the creative power of reality. The wholeness of one's surrender to that power brings release from self-pity and self-concern, indifference to flattery and contempt, freedom from partisanship to a dogma or to a person or to a sect. Religious devotion at its highest reaches a quality of transparency. One's life becomes not a magnetic pole drawing others to oneself, but a magnetic needle pointing others beyond oneself. Or, to vary the metaphor once again: "That one should be to the Eternal Goodness, as a man's hand is to a man."

#### POSTSCRIPT

The manuscript of this little book was finished two months before the outbreak of the War. Now that the storm has broken, I feel that the book's message is as true and as timely as ever. There may be a black-out of peace. There can be no black-out of God. The God of Wrath is visibly in our midst. And, as I have tried to say in this book, the God of Wrath is the God of Love. Men may destroy one another, as they must when they ignore the reality of their common life. But they cannot destroy God, or love, or their own nature, which demands that, if they are to live at all, they must live in love. The Christian message for war-time, as for peace-time, is still: "The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent ye, and believe the gospel."

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## SUGGESTED READING

FOR ANYONE WHO WOULD LIKE TO PUSH FURTHER SOME OF THE IDEAS  
IN THIS BOOK

### 1. CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

Karen Horney, *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time*. New York, Norton, \$3.00.

Psychological casualties.

Fritz Kunkel, *Let's Be Normal*. New York, Washburn, \$3.00.

Psychological first aid.

Ian D. Suttie, *Origins of Love and Hate*. London, Routledge, 10/6.

A practising psychiatrist's philosophy of psychology.

### 2. MATURE RELIGION

Henry Nelson Wieman, *Methods of Private Religious Living*. New York, Macmillan, \$1.75.

Personal religion free from magic.

John Macmurray, *Creative Society*. New York, Association Press, \$1.50.

The most searching discussion of Christianity written in recent years.

Kenneth Ingram, *The Christian Challenge to Christians*. London, Allen & Unwin, 3/6.

It lives up to its title.

### 3. RELIGION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and the Immoral Society*. New York, Scribner, \$2.00.

A powerful antidote to sentimental ethics. A great book.

John Lewis and others, *Christianity and the Social Revolution*. New York, Scribner, \$3.00.

The best collection of essays on the relation of Christianity to historic social movements.

R. B. Y. Scott and Gregory Vlastos, *Towards the Christian Revolution*. Chicago, Willett, Clark, \$2.00.

Christian faith as a social dynamic.

### 4. POLITICS AND CULTURE

Harold Laski, *The State, in Theory and Practice*. New York, Viking, \$3.00.

A masterly discussion of the social basis of political democracy.

## 80 CHRISTIAN FAITH AND DEMOCRACY

Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization*. New York, Harcourt, Brace, \$4.50.

How man makes machines, and what machines make of men.

Christopher Caudwell, *Studies in a Dying Culture*. London, Lane, 10/6.

A diagnosis of modern culture brilliantly illustrated by essays on Shaw, Wells, D. H. Lawrence, and T. E. Lawrence.

### 5. NOVELS WITH RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE

Andre Malraux, *Days of Wrath*. New York, Random House, \$1.75.

A book on courage and comradeship in a Nazi cell.

John Steinbeck, *Grapes of Wrath*. New York, Viking, \$2.75.

It vindicates faith in the dignity of the common man.

Richard Wright, *Native Son*. New York, Harper, \$2.50.

Fruits of death: exclusion, fear, isolation, self-estrangement. Seeds of life: the experience of equality, the discovery of dignity, the hope of freedom.

### 6. BIOGRAPHY WITH RELIGIOUS VALUE

Constancia de la Mora, *In Place of Splendor*. New York, Harcourt, Brace, \$3.00.

A young aristocrat joins her people's fight for life. Undeclared after the defeat.

Jawaharlal Nehru, *My Autobiography*. London, Lane, \$2.00.

One of the great spirits of our time writes with passionate honesty of his struggle.

Cedric Belfrage, *Let My People Go*. London, Gollancz, \$2.75.

A Southern preacher's astonishing religion.